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A NOVEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF SAMUEL BROHL AND COMPANY, ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

WHOEVER has travelled from Hyères to Saint-Raphaël by the railway that follows the line of the coast must have remarked on his left, after rather less than an hour's journey, a tiny town of very African aspect, built in amphitheatre fashion on one of the nearest slopes of the Maure mountains, and perched on a steep declivity, covered with lavender and cactus. All the guide-books for Provence inform us that this town, called Bormes, commands an admirable view of the beach that bears its name, in a northern corner of which is Lavandon, a pretty little fishing village used as a harbour by merchant vessels of small burden. The guide-books tell us also that the cork-tree being the principal product of the vast forests of the Maures, the important industry of the district is the manufacture of corks. But they do not say that in 1857 a cork merchant, called François Trayaz, died at the age of sixty-three, after a short illness which had not seemed particularly dangerous, leaving two sons and two daughters and a fortune of half a million.

The elder of the sons was particularly stationary in his habits, and did not believe it was possible for any one really to live outside Provence. The younger, on the contrary, was a wanderer by nature and a lover of adventures. He scorned the idea of a modest fortune, deeming poverty less humiliating than the possession of an income that was just a competence and no more. Beggar or millionaire was his motto. He had read somewhere that an emigrant who has the sense

to choose the right spot for settling in, and the right profession, and who brings money with him, is almost sure to make a big fortune. To those of his family who laughed at him, he answered: "Go and play your games of bowls, eat your onions, and take all the pleasure you can get out of your insignificant little fortunes: mine will make such a noise one of these days that it will prevent you from sleeping." Six months after his father's death he embarked for New York with his 120,000 francs.

What he did in America, how he set to work to win a great fortune, no one ever exactly knew. It is asserted that having left New York to go West, he got hold of a ranch to let in Dakota, and paid the government an absurdly small price for it, after a judicious distribution of gratuities. Twelve years later, it appears, he sold off his ten thousand head of cattle, and left for the Rockies, whither the stream of adventurers was steadily flowing. For some time he tried one new spot after another without finding anything, and was beginning to get discouraged when a lucky chance discovered to him a silver mine so rich that in a short time it was yielding him two thousand dollars a day.

What is quite certain is that he had the money-making instinct, a strong will, sharp wits, and that bold prudence which watches for opportunities, and risks nothing without careful enquiry. Add to that, few wants, few scruples, and a hard nature. He found it no hardship to dispense with the amenities of civilisation, and the intercourse of the civilised; he enjoyed life among his cowboys, and had no objection to a society of prospectors. He liked a primitive state, not far removed from the natural, where each man sees that justice is done to himself, and where he gains his case revolver in hand. It is told of him that when he was living on his ranch, he had a quarrel with a neighbour about the possession of a spring, which grew bitterer and bitterer until the cowboys took sides, and it cost three men their lives. It is even claimed that later on when he had a difficulty with the owners of a neighbouring mine, he took strong measures against them, one of them being found at the

point of death in a neighbouring ditch, and vowing before he died that he had been murdered by one of Christopher Trayaz's "fighting-men," who was arrested and tried. But this valiant defender of his master's rights was acquitted, and the rumour ran that M. Trayaz had bought the jury for the sum of fifteen thousand dollars.

His mine began to bring in less, so he sold it to some speculators, and returned to the East. He had a genius for investments, and soon doubled and trebled his fortune. But the strain began to tell, and for the first time in his life the sturdy Provençal, with his squat figure and broad heavy shoulders, fell ill. His life was despaired of; and though he recovered, he was hardly recognisable, so thin and shrunken had he grown. He went back to work, but bad attacks of fainting warned him he had exhausted his powers. His physician told him he was killing himself, that he was threatened with heart disease, and that it was imperative that he should rest. This verdict threw him into a state of consternation; he had a horror of resting, and yet he wanted to live; after all his labour, he wanted to enjoy its fruits. He was then fifty-eight years of age, and knew that America is not a place to rest in. Much against his will, after a long struggle he decided to start for Europe, and go back to spend his last years in his native land, wither he carried with him an immense fortune, an immense pride, a great scorn for the human race, a deep disdain for conventional morality, and an insolent and capricious egotism, which furnished his sole rule of conduct.

It will easily be believed what a sensation his return, after thirty years of absence, made in his village. He had never written home, and his doings were only vaguely known by hearsay and distant rumours. A complete legend had grown up about him; all kinds of impossible tales were told of him, claiming to have the authority of an inhabitant of Hyères, whose cousin german lived in America, and who affirmed that by exceedingly doubtful means Monsieur Trayaz had become one of the richest capitalists in Europe and that he possessed at the very lowest two hundred mil-

lions; as a matter of fact no one had ever seen this man of Hyères, and the two hundred millions was an exaggeration; but you can not tell from seeing a person's face that his fortune is seventy instead of two hundred millions, and when M. Trayaz went out in Bormes, women and children flew to the windows and doors to see the owner of two hundred millions pass by.

Their only surprise was that there should be so little to look at in their owner, that he should be so thin and unimposing of aspect. They looked for big shoulders and big fists; they were no longer to be seen; his very muscles had dwindled; only his nerves remained, and they tormented him. Small, thin, and bald, with hooked nose and chin, hollow cheeks, and waxen complexion, this broken-down man's great black eyes were most disquieting from their brightness and want of geniality: one of them was always open, the other he kept half shut, and, of the two, the one that was half shut seemed to see most and be the most expressive.

Come home from so far away and with such store of wealth, he was held an extraordinary being, a kind of magician, full of secrets that would die with him. He was admired, even feared, but little liked. And yet, those who knew said, there was nothing to dislike in him. His American friends declared him capable of sudden fits of generosity, and possessed of a kind of savage grace by no means displeasing, when he was in his best moods; but the slave of every kind of caprice when his nerves were upset, when he delighted to harass and humiliate his neighbour.

The first care of this bird of prey was to make himself a nest, or an eyry. The lovely plain between the station of Bormes and Lavandon is bounded on the north by the principal chain of the Maures mountains, which follow the coast line from east to west; on the south, by a secondary chain which runs out from it at Londe, and after breaking up into a series of parallel elevations, abuts on the peninsula of Cape Bénat. A smiling, fertile little valley separates two of these minor chains. From the rare beauty of its fig-trees and

their succulent fruit it is called La Figuière. The soil there is good, and can be used equally well, according to aspect, for cultivating the vine, olive, wheat, oats, strawberries, and beans. La Figuière, and a great part of the mountain covered with cork-trees that shelters it on the south, belonged to a Count Destreux, seldom seen by his tenants, whose château grew more dilapidated every year without his ever taking the trouble to repair it. On several occasions, in his needs for money, he had sold portions of his ample domains. At last he decided to sell the rest. A purchaser had appeared, and they had nearly come to terms, when M. Trayaz came on the scene, outbidding him so enormously that he carried the day.

Although delighted with his acquisition he did not mean to be content with it alone. He objected to enclosures, and meant not only to recover the lands that had been sold, until the vast property had reassumed its original proportions, but to add to it until he was owner of the whole valley. He easily disposed of the smaller proprietors of what he considered pieces of his estate, for which he made them offers they would have been mad to refuse. But there are still to be found individuals, who prefer to the pleasure of growing rich by a good bargain, that of keeping anything they have once possessed, and proving to the world they have a will of their own, and mean to abide by it.

Two obstinate owners, one a peasant, the other an artist, declined all M. Trayaz's proposals: he tried in vain to circumvent them, they remained firm. He liked to carry things with a high hand, and had no taste for diplomacy. His dictum was: "I want it, and I pay money down; name your price." The artist and the peasant answered: "We are very comfortable where we are, and mean to stay there." The man who had bought an American jury was amazed and indignant at the resistance of these two fools who did not know their own interests. Happily, at this juncture, Providence vouchsafed him a new mark of its favour, and sent him M. Félix Sucquier.

He was an agent, recently come to settle in the neigh-

bourhood. There had been some rather nasty reports about him, but no one believed them; it often happens that a Provençal will believe what is not true, and refuse to believe what is. Yet his red puffy face, low brow, and pimply cheeks, his underhand look, and big, ill-shaped mouth did not prepossess in his favour. The first time he saw him, M. Trayaz thought him exceedingly ugly; disliking in him most his clammy hands and unctuous voice, which he held proof positive of the truth of the unfavourable reports. But he had no natural aversion for rogues, whom he considered more easily managed and often more useful than honest folk, provided of course you know them thoroughly, and have them at your mercy. He talked to M. Sucquier until he had turned him thoroughly inside out, extorted all kinds of confessions from him, and got a pretty complete knowledge of his past. After which he decided he was his creature, began to use him, and found him a satisfactory tool.

M. Sucquier undertook the peasant first. He announced to him one day, in a tone of lugubrious sympathy, that the water he had hitherto used to irrigate his strawberry beds and vegetables would soon be taken away from him; that its use had only been allowed to him out of pure good-nature; that the stream from which he supplied himself having its spring in a part of the mountain recently purchased by M. Trayaz, the new proprietor of La Figuière had the right to divert the course elsewhere, and meant to do so. "Let him, I shall have the law of him," answered the peasant. On which the officious and unctuous go-between, who could take a different tone when he liked, began to laugh. What was the use of going to law with a man who was worth two hundred millions!

"Two hundred millions!" scoffed the peasant, who prided himself on not being easily taken in. "That's a joke of the Bormes' folk. If anyone is the owner of two hundred millions, it's not that lean little jackanapes, who looks more like a plucked fowl than anything else."

"Right you are there: I know from a certain and reliable source that he has but sixty, and as in America the title of

millionaire is only given to those who possess a million pounds sterling, that's to say twenty-five millions of francs, the little lean man is only a millionaire twice and a half over. As you please. Go to law if you like, and may Heaven help you!"

It took three months to convince the peasant, then he gave in, and M. Sucquier received a heavy fee.

The other was more difficult to manage. The estate of M. Trayaz stretched, on the east, right out to the sea. He had succeeded Count Destreux in the possession of a semi-circular creek bounded on one side by a bare cliff, on the other by a well wooded mountain and a rocky promontory, which, seen from a distance resembles a crouching sphinx asking its riddles of the fishermen and sea-gulls, and telling them its dreams. This creek was about a mile and a half in length, and to his eyes not by any means the most contemptible of his possessions. He was proud of his beach of fine sand that shone like silver, and of his wind-tossed dunes covered with their pale herbage. The beach at Lavandon, where they come from far and wide to bathe, is only defended from the sun by a curtain of tamarisks; the creek at La Figuière is sheltered by a great wood of sea-firs, among which are splendid Scotch pines.

It is a delicious place, especially in the spring when the gorse is growing golden, and the rock-roses are opening their pink and white blossoms. A place impossible to behold without dreaming of building a chalet there. This idea had suggested itself long ago to an old painter, known all round there by the name of Father Antoine. He had discovered the enchanting spot, and bought just enough land from Count Destreux to build himself half way down the cliff, on a ledge of granite, a studio and a little house called by everyone the "Antonine." He spent there three quarters of the year, doing all his housework himself, his great delight being that he owed to no other person the pleasure and satisfaction he got out of performing for himself every small service. He was very fond of fishing; from the cliff ran out a line of rocks, and he moored his boat to them, so that it

was thus protected against the winds by a natural mole. As, for the artist soul, seeing is possessing, all that he saw from his windows he considered he possessed. The pine-wood, the silvery beach, the sphinx-shaped promontory, the islands, Port-Croz, and the Titan, the ocean and its waves, the sky, its clouds and its stars, all were his possessions as much as the Antonine.

M. Trayaz had quite different ideas about ownership; he felt that he should never really possess the creek till the day when he had dislodged this intruder, this usurper of another man's lands. He did the usurper the justice to acknowledge his good taste in choosing for his habitation such a delightfully situated and naturally lovely spot; that only made him the more impatient to get it from him. But how to do it? The first person who tried to make an arrangement with the artist could hardly persuade him to hear him out.

"No, a thousand times no!" he cried. "Is he insatiable, this man of millions? Go and tell him I would not give up my Antonine for all his money. It is the one unalloyed pleasure of all the pleasures I have ever enjoyed. We are wedded to each other. Man alive, let this King David leave Uriah his wife, and the poor man his one ewe lamb!"

Some time after, as he was coming back one day from a fishing expedition, he saw a building contractor and his workmen, armed with cords, and surveyors' chains, and spirit-levels, hard at work making measurements, and every now and then putting a red cross on one of the old pines, which they thus marked for felling. At mid-day they left, and came back again after two hours' absence. Old Antoine was puzzled and anxious. He tried to get into talk with the master mason, out of whom he could make nothing. In the evening he walked out to Lavandon, where he sometimes went for his glass of absinthe. On the way he met M. Sucquier, whom he knew by sight. He stopped, and began to question him.

"Oh, I don't know anything about it," said the agent, "but I can make a pretty good guess. I can see very well

that M. Trayaz, who has more money than he knows what to do with, is no scorner of small profits. The people who come to winter here are leaving the big hotels; the fashion now is to have a villa or a chalet. At Lavandon several have been built lately, and it's said that M. Trayaz means to build four or five in his creek; they say, too, they're all snapped up beforehand. He'll cut down part of the wood, leaving just enough for shade. If you want my private opinion, I tell you I think it's a downright shame, that the man is disgraced by such an act. I've always thought that old trees are sacred. After all, though, you won't mind. You're master in your own little place, and will have your house at all events, which no one can touch. Let's hope you'll have quiet neighbours."

"I came here to get rid of neighbours," answered old Antoine with an angry gesture, "and M. Trayaz is a brute!"

"Between ourselves, I think so too," replied M. Sucquier, "but I don't say it very loud."

And he cut short the confabulation, like a man who has said more than he meant, and wishes he could get back his words.

Next day, the contractor reappeared, and soon the work was begun. The old painter was broken-hearted; he had lost his solitude, his repose, his happiness, his sea, his sky; they had taken from the Antonine all its charms. There was only one thing to do—to sell: he asked an exorbitant price, which was agreed to without a word. When everything was settled, deeds signed, and the money in his pocket, he went to M. Trayaz for the bitter satisfaction of giving him a piece of his mind. He abused him for a bourgeois, Philistine, barbarian, miser, despoiler of beautiful spots, shameless speculator. M. Trayaz listened to him in silence, looking even rather abstracted and compunctious; then he broke in:

"My dear Sir, you have rather a fiery way of telling people the truth about themselves; it's the only way of making any impression, and I admire your method. Your

reproaches have touched the barbarian, and your eloquence has saved the life of my pines. I give up my plans, and my building; your house, which is really charming, shall be carefully preserved by me as a memento of the too well deserved lesson you have just given me."

Some days later it was known that M. Sucquier had been appointed agent to M. Trayaz, who rewarded his ingenuity by a big salary. He demanded much from those in his service, but he paid them well.

He had reconstituted his kingdom and enlarged its borders; now he had to settle where he should live in it. The old manor of Count Destreux did not attract him. He did not think it worth while to repair it, and live in it. If he had pride, he was exempt from the smaller vanities of a parvenue, and cared nothing for composite façades. He had become very American, and preferred to the most ornate architecture an airy villa, furnished with every modern luxury and comfort. He had the château pulled down, and the materials handed over to whoever liked to cart them away; which generosity gained him the favour of the district, and produced some pretty lively quarrels, that amused him immensely. For his villa he chose a terrace conspicuous for miles around from an immense cedar that grew on it. When you are building in the Var, the difficulty is to choose your site so that at the same time you get a fine view, and are sheltered from the mistral.

This terrace commanded a vast horizon, and a spur of the mountain protected it on the northwest. He sent for great squads of workmen, and began the new building before the old one even was down. After long discussions, his architect had managed to produce a plan that suited him. The building was separated into two main blocks, oblong in shape, and two storied, with gables artistically decorated; a big court-yard separated these two wings, centrally connected by a building reached through a covered gallery, whose arches were supported by rustic pillars. The main work of building was promptly proceeded with, and for the furniture and hangings he sent to Paris and London. He

despised all that was showy and loud, preferring in everything what was solid, thoroughly luxurious, of good quality; and without pretention, elegant.

So far he had lived at one of his tenants' farms. All that recalled to him the memory of his early narrow life, the already distant years when he had toiled and known privation, gave him pleasure. However, when the beautiful spring day arrived on which he took possession of what he called the asylum of his old age, his heart dilated and his eye grew soft. He chose his own rooms in the left wing. His balcony, with a south-east aspect, whither rose the scent of the citrons in flower, looked on a big garden, which he had kept on in the intention of beautifying it. Opposite him, set in a frame of mountain, and of oak forest, stretched his eight hundred acres of land in cultivation, his fields of rye and oats, his vines, his olive orchards, watered by his river, with its border of long rows of canes. The red tiles of his farm roofs made spots of bright colour in the landscape, and the vivid green of his fig-trees contrasted deliciously with the gloomier verdure of the evergreens. One of the windows of his library looked on the plain of Lavandon, and through a gap in the hillside he could see right out to the village of Bormes, clinging to the mountain slope. He liked to smoke his pipe in this window. Astride on a tapestry covered chair, he looked out on to the place where he had been born; and believed even he could see, not far from a big palm, the house where one day his father had got up from table, to fall into a sleep from which he never again woke. He had long talks with the dead. To him alone he told his thoughts.

It was three years since his return to Provence, and six months since he had been settled down in his own house, when one autumn evening, after winning three games of billiards with M. Sucquier, he suddenly realised that though he was thoroughly satisfied with his villa, and had there every luxury and comfort, he was getting bored to death. The discovery terrified him.

"Is it true," he asked himself, "that rest means bore-

dom, and that it is more easy to acquire wealth than to enjoy it?"

He pondered long over this melancholy and appalling problem. That evening, the man so favoured by fortune felt as poor, and was as miserable and gloomy, in the contemplation of his good things, as the old painter could have been at separating for ever from his beloved Antonine.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN he had decided to come back to Provence to grow old, M. Trayaz had intended to live a very solitary existence. His pride had persuaded this misanthrope that he had no need of others in his life, and would easily find within himself his own happiness. If he had built a big house, that was only in order that the palace might correspond with the kingdom in extent. He had enough servants in it to procure a certain amount of movement round him, and to ensure that his empty rooms should be well kept; but he had only thought of entertaining in it his friends from America, if ever by chance they came to see him. He was not a sun for whose happiness it was necessary that he should be surrounded by planets revolving round his glory, and reflecting his own light.

So long as he had been occupied in buying fields and chalets from men who had no wish to sell them, in pulling down an old château, and building a new villa, the hours had seemed short enough to him. Once free of these cares, they grew longer. However considerable his business correspondence might be, he soon had it off his hands. His frequent conferences with his agent were an insufficient distraction; his orders were soon given; he spoke always to the point, and hated repeating himself. He tried interesting himself in his farms, visiting frequently his tenants. Unfortunately agriculture had little charm for him, for the feverish eagerness of his mind, his lightning thought. He

grew impatient with the soil, and its slow workings. It would have been a different matter if he had had vast wastes to convert into fertile cultivated regions, deserts to reclaim: La Figuière had long been a highly cultivated spot, where much labour had been expended; there was nothing here to be devised, nothing to do but complete. He had none of the tastes that get rid of time. He could have said like a certain wise man: "I do not drink, I do not play, I do not read; in short I have no vices, and I am told that life isn't bearable without any." When he had glanced through the long columns of the *New York Herald*, and the shorter columns of the *Petit Marseillais*, he knew all he cared to. He lunched and dined tête-à-tête with M. Sucquier, and though he thought highly of the agent's merits, there were moments when his red spotty face, unctuous voice, and honeyed smile nearly made him sick. M. Sucquier, who was not lacking in penetration, was not long in discovering that his wealthy patron was getting bored; that meant that he might get so disgusted with La Figuière, he would sell it, and the agent did not like the prospect of losing his situation.

"Monsieur Trayaz," he ventured one day, "what is wanting here is a lady. It would be the easiest thing in the world for *you* to find your ideal."

"You propose that I should marry? It's the first foolish thing I've heard you say, my dear Sucquier. I sincerely hope it'll be the last."

Then, after reflecting a moment, he went on: "Now I come to think of it, I've got relations of my own; I think I'll make acquaintance with them. They'll amuse me perhaps, and liven up the house, of which so far you've been the only ornament."

He was right; although for three years he had never seemed to remember it, he had relations. One sister and one brother were dead, dying like their father, at sixty-three. But his second sister had been more fortunate: she had just reached her sixty-fifth year, and was in excellent health. She was the widow of a merchant of Marseilles,

who had made much money and had spent much. Marseilles is a town that those who have once lived in can never leave: Madame Limiès had stayed on there, living on her modest income, only leaving the place to do some kindness to those belonging to her. Was there any serious illness to be looked after, any quarrels to pacify, any disagreeable matter to set right, they sent for her and she went. She was one of those women born to be beasts of burden for others. She had two daughters; both of them had tried more than once to induce this useful mother to settle with one of them. But she knew these daughters she adored could never agree together, that to belong to one would be to quarrel with the other, so the minute she had done for them all they wanted, and that was necessary, she went straight back home. Even in the interest of her affections she cherished her independence, and she loved Marseilles.

The elder of these two daughters had married, twenty years before, a Lorrainer, M. Raoul Lejail, whose merits were sounder than his health. He was a barrister; but having early imbibed a taste for public office, had never pleaded. After being secretary, then chief-secretary to a prospective minister, he had obtained a *sous-préfecture* in Le Var, and it was at Toulon that he had met and married Mlle. Mélanie Limiès. Some years after his marriage he had been appointed préfet in Corsica, where the people under his jurisdiction gave him so much trouble he got sick of his profession and renounced all his ambitions. He had managed to save, and being disgusted with living for others, promised himself henceforth to live for self.

His complexion was delicate, and for no other reason he decided he was threatened by consumption, when there was really nothing the matter, but a tendency to catch cold easily. However, his idea was that small indispositions not properly attended to lead to fatal illnesses. He believed that the coast of Provence was the only spot of French territory where a delicate man with no tendency to suicide could live, but he declared that even this Paradise was full of pit-falls. He had made successive stays in all the health-

resorts visited on the Mediterranean coast, in the vain hope of coming upon one where the mistral never blows. For want of a better place, he had definitely settled down at "Le Dattier," a pretty, very sheltered little hamlet midway between Lavandon and Saint-Tropez. The inhabitants declared that dates would sometimes ripen there, but I have never met anyone who has eaten them. M. Lejail maintained that, even at Le Dattier, it is only possible to live on, if you take infinite precautions, and that if he had not taken the greatest care, he would have died there before a year was out. When he went out for a walk, he always took two overcoats, one heavy and one light, and in going out of the sunshine into the shade, or from a southern to a northern direction, he would put on whichever the change required, and sometimes both at once.

However, we must do the invalid the justice to say that though he was more or less a "malade imaginaire" he was no Argau, and would have been incapable of marrying his daughter to young Diafoirus even to be present at consultations. He was his own consulting physician; holding that the best doctor is the patient who has consulted medical books and studied his own case perpetually. He was not one of those inconvenient eccentrics who demand that every one should pity them and take an interest in their aches and pains. He undertook to look after himself, only asking to be left alone, and never called upon to infringe one of the articles of the careful *régime* he had prescribed for himself. Setting aside his one weakness, M. Lejail was a very intelligent man, with sound judgment, a pleasant talker, and very well informed, especially in matters of history and law. A Parisian friend had dubbed him the intelligent egoist. A lover of books who possesses a library need never be dull at Le Dattier, and no one could ever be bored, if he were a skilful doctor attached to the person of a very complicated invalid, in whom he is passionately interested.

With Madame Lejail it was quite different. Le Dattier was for her a prison, a tomb; many people came and went there, but since the world began, M. Lejail alone had ever

thought of living in it. She protested all the more against her lot, that she only half believed in her husband's colds; though she never dared say so—it would have been quite ground enough for a divorce. This brunette woman, with her regular, rather hard features, remembered she had been Madame la Préfète, and in her smile there was still something discreet and official. She mourned the days of her grandeur; born for society, where she had been a success, she sometimes allowed M. Lejail to feel the enormity of the sacrifice he had imposed on her. Her worst grief was that she had a daughter to marry, and that there is no marrying nor giving in marriage at Le Dattier. Very pretty, very elegant, as fair as her mother was brunette, Mlle. Huguette Lejail had just entered on her eighteenth year. She knew her own value, too. The depths of solitude to which her archness and charms had been consigned had by no means made her timid; her tones were deliberate, her speech incisive and clear. The winter before, Mme. Lejail had sent her to spend three months with her grandmother at Marseilles, and the grandmother had introduced her to her friends, and brought her out at a ball there. She had been fêted and admired; but none of her partners had seemed disposed to ask for her hand. They found her charming but imperious; perhaps also they feared she might be one of those women whom it is expensive to love, that she had too many whims and not enough "*dot.*"

Mme. Lejail's younger sister seemed to have a more enviable lot. She was not living in a desert solitude, with no other amusement than accompanying every year a valetudinarian husband into that valley of the Alps he had chosen, from hygienic reasons, for his summer abode. Her husband, M. Hector de la Farlède, was a country gentleman living in his ancestral home at the entrance to the town of Grasse, so celebrated for its essences and perfumes. Among the townsfolk and visitors, there was always some one to amuse herself with. Backbiters say that M. de la Farlède's father used at first to call himself just plain M. Bourdigue; that as time went on he had added the name of the village

he had been born in to his own; and that his son, who cared less for the first of the two names than for the second, had ended by juggling it away; and after signing his letters "Bourdigue de la Farlède," at last only signed them "B. de la Farlède." If they liked, his correspondents could suppose him a baron; he did not take this title, but found no fault with any one who bestowed it on him.

He was a man of big form, and big voice, of prepossessing appearance, easy manners, and big round eyes bordered by such pale eyelashes that they seemed at first sight to be white. They, and his pretentions to nobility, were his distinguishing characteristics. He prided himself on possessing aristocratic friends, and happening to be acquainted with a count and a marchioness of the neighbourhood, took care that every one knew of it. So small an allowance of intelligence had he been endowed with that he never suspected his wife's share to be much bigger than his own. He gave himself all the airs of lord and master, while in reality it was she who was governing. But she took care to spare his *amour propre*, to persuade him that when he was doing what she wanted, *he* was imposing *his* wishes on his humble servant.

After they had been married six years, her son Jules was born; and she was wrapped up in him from the first. But, unhappily, after being a source of infinite delight in his babyhood, M. Jules had grown into a source of infinite anxiety in his boyhood. From the first he was extremely backward. For the beginning, she tried to reassure herself by the reflection that many a man of genius has begun by being a backward child; but at last she had to give in and confess that this twisted mind would never properly untwist itself. At twelve he had been sent to school, but had had to be removed; he had to have private masters, who struggled in a vain endeavour to strike a spark from this flint; no spark had even been emitted, and Madame de la Farlède asked herself in fear and trembling what was to be the future of this son of hers. Why was she not the owner of millions?

Millions can purchase pardon for anything. This stout lad, in flourishing health, losing in superfluous flesh the little intelligence Providence had granted him, looked on life and the world open-mouthed, with startled eyes, like one surveying an unknown county, where he despairs of finding his way. At thirteen, he had the manners and tastes of a baby, and to make things worse was rustic in appearance and style, much more Bourdigue than de la Farlède. His ambitious mother compared him sadly with children of his own age. In her hours of depression, her lovely, velvety eyes, which in former days had suggested volumes of romance, now revealed her maternal discomfiture, and said in veiled language that her son was her idol and her cross.

The two sisters gave each other but little sympathy. Mme. de la Farlède could not forgive her sister for having a daughter who was not backward, and Mme. Lejail could not forgive Madame de la Farlède for not calling herself plain Mme. Bourdigue, or for her occasional attempts at playing the baroness. What embittered their dissensions was that the elder used to accuse Mme. Limiès of sacrificing herself to her younger daughter, and that the younger daughter suspected that in the bottom of her heart her mother preferred Huguette to Jules. When they met, they met amicably; but they took care to meet seldom.

During his thirty years in America, M. Trayaz had never sent home a word. For years they had believed him dead, or dragging out in some obscure corner a miserable existence. One day, Mme. Limiès heard from someone, who knew someone said to have seen him, that he was living in New York, and was very rich. He had been till then almost forgotten, his name never mentioned, and at once they began to talk and wonder about him. When Mlle. Huguette, who was still only a little girl, but with a taste for spending already well developed, asked her father for money for some costly whim, he used to answer: "Go and ask your grand-uncle Christopher!" which made her very mad, because she had no sort of belief in the existence of this

eternal absentee. And why? who knows? Two or three years later, it happened to her to dream about him; she was superstitious, and felt certain henceforth he was still living, and that he would come back, when she promised herself she would apply to him pretty often. Suddenly the news came that he had returned, that he had made so many dollars over there he didn't know what to do with them, and that to get rid of a few he had bought La Figuière. The news made a tremendous sensation. M. Trayaz had felt nothing like it the day he discovered his silver mine. What a regular gold-mine was an uncle from America who had the triple merit of possessing seventy or eighty millions, the beginnings of a heart complaint, and of being a bachelor! He became their one waking thought; they thought even oftener than they spoke of him. But we must do Mme. Lejail and Mme. de la Farlède the justice to acknowledge that these tender mothers had no thought of themselves in this matter: thanks to their uncle, the one cherished a hope that her daughter would marry a prince, the other that her son, whose wits still showed no signs of development, would henceforth manage to get along without them.

Yet weeks and months went by, and Uncle Christopher made no sign of life; it seemed as though he meant to have nothing to do with his family. At Le Dattier, as at Grasse, they were in a fever of impatience, hardly knew what to do with themselves. The grandmother, who was always sent for in every difficulty, was once more requisitioned to devote herself to the interests of her daughters and grandchildren. Mme. Limiès had written some time before to her brother to congratulate him, and express her anxiety soon to see him again: she had received no reply. They demanded that she should go and attack this mysterious, silent person in his solitude.

It was not without emotion that she presented herself at La Figuière, where she found M. Trayaz busy with the building of his house. Seated on a beam, in the midst of a heap of rubbish, he was hurrying on the masons at their work. He condescended to offer his sister a seat on his

very shaky beam, but his welcome was most frigid. He replied in briefest fashion to the questions she asked him, and found none to ask her. He announced that he had come back to Europe to rest, and that one can only rest if one is left alone. He took this opportunity to express his admiration for American customs, and the Yankee scorn of our antique prejudices concerning family relations, speaking of one of his friends over there whose son had displeased him, and who had given thirty millions to a university, and sixteen to a public library, and he found much to say in praise of the uses to which his friend had put his property. When she decided to say good-bye he made no effort to keep her any longer.

"I can't ask you to dinner," he said; "I am living with one of my farmers, who is supplying my meals at present."

And she went back, dismayed at his conversation and still more by the way he had now and then looked over her. This pale, hard little man, though he was her brother, had seemed to her a stranger she had never seen before, and this stranger terrified her. She had a kind of impression that she had been talking with a wild boar, and that the boar thought he had been extremely magnanimous to allow her to leave his lair alive. She wrote at once to her daughters, and the gist of her letters was "relinquish all hope in that direction!" Her daughters, in their consternation, accused her of having made a bungle, of having been clumsy and tactless in dealing with him. That's the way people have of rewarding you, when you take a good deal of trouble for them.

What was her surprise when, eighteen months later, she received from M. Trayaz a letter inviting her and her children to come and pay him a visit on the first of February, and telling her he hoped they would be able to stay some time. She was at the time ill in bed. But she hastened to thank this brother who had frightened her so much, and promise to avail herself of his kind invitation as soon as she was well again, and then wrote off at once to her daughters and their husbands. Their delight was only equalled by

their amazement. For a whole week M. de la Farlède seemed puffed out to twice his ordinary size: that was the effect his joy produced on him. His charming wife, who was never visibly puffed up, was always delightfully overflowing with talk and small snatches of song when things went as she liked; now she might be heard singing about from morning to night. She ordered any amount of new frocks, regretting that her mother had never thought of enquiring what was M. Trayaz's favourite colour. In the midst of her preparations she found time to lecture Jules, and tried to make him understand the importance of the occasion, what he ought to do to win his grand-uncle's favour, and that his future depended on it. She begged him to be careful what he did, not to go about open-mouthed nor with his tongue out, and he promised solemnly when he was told that they might be some weeks at La Figuière, and that there would be no tutor there with them.

Mme. Lejail was just as pleased as her sister, but she had difficulties to encounter in overcoming the resistance of the ex sous-préfet. At first he violently objected. How could they think of such a thing? To go away on a visit in the very middle of winter alarmed him unspeakably; he was quite certain that a villa built by a Provençal who had lived so long in foreign countries he must have forgotten the peculiarities of his own, would be a nest of dangers to health; he predicted draughts and every kind of catastrophe; did they wish to kill him? Mme. de la Farlède might manage her husband with what blandishments she liked; the irreproachable Mme. Lejail could take a high hand sometimes with hers. She let him understand he was absurd, and that a father must be able to sacrifice himself for his children. He gave in at last. An intelligent man has generally a pretty fair share of curiosity: he was not sorry to have an opportunity of finding out what manner of man was this Americanised Provençal who was being talked about in every direction, even as far as Draguignan and Nice. Mme. Lejail did not trouble herself with giving instructions to her daughter; she knew that this

young person, who was as far seeing as she was pretty, would furnish herself with plenty. From the first moment Huguette had resolved to make a conquest of her uncle, and as she always liked to go straight ahead, had decided that then he would see after getting her married, and if he were not stingy would give her a *dot* of at least one or two millions. Her imagination had no other use for her than to give charm and a kind of festive air to her culculations; whatever of romance there was in her was at the service of a very positive little egotism, and in her reveries there were always to be found figures.

Mme. Lejail hoped that her sister, who was very particular over the minutiæ of dress, and went in for elaborate toilettes, would not be ready by the day arranged, that she would be first in point of time, first in reconnoitring the fortress and picking up information, and first in favour because of her zeal in arriving first. She was mistaken, and when she took her place in the train *du Sud-France*, found herself face to face with a blonde lady she had believed still in Grasse. She succeeded in hiding her disgust, and after kissing each other, the two sisters settled down to a talk about indifferent matters, to conceal from each other the passionate interest they both felt in the great business that had absorbed them both for the last fortnight.

At eleven o'clock they arrived at Bormes, and found two landaus waiting at the station, with a waggon for luggage. As they drew nearer and nearer to La Figuière their agitation grew and grew, and their hearts began to beat uncomfortably fast. Their mother's alarming description of the wild boar came into the mind of each. Why was she not there to help, to parry or receive all the blows? Was not this one of those cases when a mother, at any cost, even if she were dying, would rise from her bed?

At last they arrived, and were relieved to find that the terrible uncle was much more genial than they had expected. He came up to the carriage in person to welcome them; spite of the mist that swam before agitated eyes, he appeared gracious and smiling. M. Sucquier took them to

the wing built for visitors, and showed them the rooms that had been got ready for them, on the ground floor, and the story above. They found everything most comfortable, and in excellent taste, and flowers everywhere. Even M. Lejail was reconciled to his fate when he learnt from the agent that his rooms on the ground-floor were built over the cellar, and when a conscientious exploration had convinced him that there was nowhere any trace of damp, that his room had a southern aspect, that the chimney did not smoke, and that the sunshine streaming in through his two windows was almost as warm as at Le Dattier.

As soon as the two sisters were fully equipped, they proceeded through the covered gallery to the *salon*, where their uncle was waiting for them. A servant in brown livery announced the next moment that *déjéuner* was ready. M. Trayaz gave his arm to Mme. Lejail. The meal was an excellent one, and delighted M. de la Farlède, who was the gourmand of the party. Their host proved to be very pleasant, lively, and interested in everything. They were astonished to find him *au fait* with the little details that don't get into newspapers, not knowing that among his numerous functions M. Sucquier included that of purveyor of news in general, and made it his business to find out everything he might want to know. He declared at dessert that the family is decidedly a noble institution, that it has charms nothing else can replace, that he had been too long a stranger to his own, and that he hoped his guests would be able to make themselves happy with him for two or three months. Radiant with delight his two nieces telegraphed to each other a look that said: "What could our mother have been thinking of? He is charming."

As they rose from table, with one hand under Huguette's chin, and caressing her hair with the other, M. Trayaz said:

"What a sweet slip of a girl! Can she play?"

"She can sing," Mme. Lejail hastened to reply.

It was true, she could sing; she had a good voice, with very pleasant middle notes, but rather harsh upper ones.

M. Trayaz led her to the piano. He was fond of music, but was not very particular as to the subject or its execution.

A village fiddler's performance was sufficient to fire his imagination, and conjure up for him visions that obscured this sublimary world; where a man who has stopped hard work does not know what to do with his fortune, and where the only choice is between effort and ennui. When Huguette had sung her song, which Mme. Lejail accompanied, he complimented her skill, and Mme. de la Farlède's brow became clouded. But he kept the balance equal, by tapping Jules on the cheek and asking him to recite a fable. His poor mother was in an agony. But happily there is a special providence over fools and children, and Jules, who had enjoyed his déjêuner, and was beginning to like La Figuière, managed to get through the fable of the Cobbler and the Financier! As a matter of fact he mumbled, missed out a good many words, and left much to the imagination of his auditors; but his uncle again tapped him on the cheek, and told him he had an excellent memory; adding, "My boy, don't you believe old La Fontaine. In America I knew a financier who had just as many dreams as the cobbler."

And he uttered a profound sigh; at which they concluded his nights were not good. Decidedly the millionaire had every virtue one could ask.

He took the ladies to see his conservatories, which were magnificently kept, and himself picked up a pruning-knife, to cut off two of his rarest blossoms, which with his own hands he fastened into their bodices. Again they said: "He is perfectly charming: what can our mother have been thinking of?" When they had gone back to their rooms, to look after their maids who had been unpacking, he took off the two men to look round with him. It was a critical moment for M. Lejail. That day, as so often happens in a Provençal February, the sun was hot, but it was cold in the shade. M. Lejail armed himself with his white umbrella, took his two overcoats on his left arm, and on the way, donned first one, and then the other, without M. Trayaz ap-

pearing to find anything singular in his proceedings. M. de la Farlède, who had just won the Agricultural Order of Merit, explained in pompous fashion how he had fattened his pigs, which had won a prize. M. Trayaz seemed so interested in these details that the successful rearer of pigs said to himself, like his wife, "Why, he's charming, a capital fellow." More circumspect, and more sceptical, M. Lejail reserved his judgment. His wider experience of men had taught him not to judge by first appearance, but wait for developments, which sometimes show a man to be less agreeable than he at first appears.

And indeed M. Trayaz was not quite so charming at dinner time, and things did not go quite as well. It was the fault of the ex-préfet, who would never relinquish his eternal little black velvet cap, and would have died rather than diverge in any particular from his régime, which prescribed that he should eat very little in the evening, if he did not mean to murder sleep. The host perceived that he refused the extras and only just touched his fish.

"You are not eating anything, Lejail. To deprive life of all its pleasures in order to lengthen it seems to me a foolish business, and after all, of what use are a régime or precautions of any kind? Believe me, you'll die sooner than you expect."

M. de la Farlède could not be reproached for any remissness of that kind; he did ample justice to dinner as to déjêuner, but could talk of nothing but his *comte* or his *marquise*. When the champagne came M. Trayaz proposed a toast.

"I drink," said he, "to the virtues of my charming niece, Mme. Lejail, to her sweet daughter's lovely locks and voice, to M. le Préfet's skull-cap. I drink to the grace and the *beaux yeux* of my niece Blandine, and the rosy cheeks of her son Jules."

Then he turned to M. de la Farlède, but his glass trembled in his hand, and he set it down on the table, saying:

"Excuse my emotion, dear Bourdigue de la Farlède: it's

the first time I drink the health of a baron, the friend of a *comte* and a *marquise*."

They had hardly settled themselves in the *salon* when he announced that it was his custom always to retire punctually at nine and do business with his agent; he begged his guests to amuse themselves just as they pleased, and pointing out to them the card-tables and billiard-room, went up to his own apartments, followed by M. Sucquier.

CHAPTER III.

LATER on, between ten and eleven, Monsieur and Madame Lejail were alone in their own sitting-room. Huguette had left them to go and write a letter in her own room. Enveloped in a heavy dressing-gown, M. Lejail was seated in a big arm-chair by the fire-place, his skull-cap pulled down over his eyes, his legs stretched out so that he could warm the soles of his slippers at the roaring fire, on which he continually piled more logs. The epigram M. Trayaz had discharged at him remained in the ex-préfet's mind, and the sinister prediction that had accompanied it sent a shiver down his spine. M. Lejail loved a joke, and could make one himself; but his health and his régime were sacred subjects: to speak of them lightly seemed to him desecration just as scandalous as laughing in church. He was bitterly regretting his beloved Le Dattier, and cursing his weakness in allowing himself to be dragged to La Figuière. He looked like a man possessed by a thoroughly disagreeable idea. What increased his irritation was that Mme. Lejail, her eyes fixed on a cup of tea where she seemed to be reading her destiny, looked happy and content, while her severe countenance was even momentarily illuminated by a smile.

With fury in his heart, he threw on another log. "What on earth are you doing, Raoul?" his wife said, pulling back her chair. "We are not in Siberia."

"Are you going to tell me to be careful of his wood?"

"I tell you I don't want to be roasted. If you are cold, have some tea. My uncle has had it straight from India—and it's delicious."

"Like its owner. . . . Could anything be more stupid? We've been living together now for twenty years, and you don't yet know that tea is poison to me."

She shook her head, and after a moment's silence: "I think we shall have a very nice stay here. My mother scolds me sometimes for making mountains out of mole-hills; this day I have dreaded so much has been quite pleasant after all. *He* has shown that he cares for his family, and I think he took a fancy to Huguette at once."

"Yes, let's speak of *him* a little. You hardly do him justice, my dear; he not only cares for his family, but he is so extremely amiable, so charming in his manners, so irreproachably courteous. . . ."

"Oh, do be careful, somebody may hear you; don't speak quite so loud."

"I shall speak just as loud as I please" (but he lowered his voice), "and I declare that this charming man has a naturally agreeable disposition, and has of course brought it to its present perfection in America. It's there, one may suppose, that he has learnt to speak to people of their decease in this unfeeling way."

She pursed up her lips:

"Even if you had eaten that fish, would it have killed you?"

"I don't see why it should not have done. Little you'd care!"

"You have been nearly dying for so long now," she murmured, "I'm beginning to get used to it."

He didn't defend himself; this time he attacked, and pushing back his skull-cap to the back of his head, went on:

"That's enough about my health, in which you are so extremely interested! But let me tell you, my dear, that you think yourself very clever, as most women do, and

make a great mistake as a rule. You think you're doing a good thing for yourself by coming here. . . ."

"Oh, do speak more quietly," she said, tapping on the table with her hand.

"Oh bother, have the walls in this house ears? if they have, it's the one thing wanting to make a visit here perfectly delightful. . . . I repeat that you are making a great mistake, that the worshippers of the golden calf are often the dupes. . . ."

"There are things it is allowable to think, but not to say."

"I say them. How are you going to prevent me? This evening I am in the mood for saying them. You've come here full of expectations, resolved to be pleased with your uncle, and endure with angelic patience any affront he may put upon you. . . ."

"But so far, it seems to me. . . ."

"Oh, of course, so far it's only *I* who have been affronted, and *I* don't count. But your turn will come, Mélanie; and then remember my prophecy: your uncle's a big hoax, and we shall leave this house just about as rich as we entered it."

"You're an incorrigible pessimist," she replied, filling her cup for the second time with the Indian tea she found so delicious. "Thank Heaven, the catastrophes you announce don't always arrive."

"Possibly, but remember what this charming man said to your mother. He regaled her with the history of an American who disinherited his family and gave thirty millions to some university or other. You may take it for granted he means to found another somewhere in Ohio, or Dakota or Wisconsin perhaps. I'm as certain about it as if I'd done it all myself. Listen to me, his university will be called after him, and will get all his money; Mme. Lejail will have nothing. He's proud and he's bored; so he sent for us to help him kill time, as a kind of provisional distraction. We are his menagerie; when his monkeys, his gazelles, and his bow-wows don't amuse him any longer,

he'll say 'ta-ta' to them and send them off home again shamefaced and wretched, their tails between their legs."

At this juncture, the door into the next room opened. Mlle. Huguette appeared on the threshold, a comb in one hand, her long locks in the other. She never listened at key-holes, but her hearing was acute.

"Mamma's right," she said: "you're a hopeless pessimist. But when you set about prophesying, it's not enough to believe, you must know, and no one knows anything till it has happened. There's a man here whose conversation ought to be very useful to us; he's called M. Sucquier, and I'm certain my uncle tells him his secrets. He sat by me at table; and though he's very ugly, and not over clean, I was very nice to him, and I'm sure he likes me. Talk to him to-morrow. When one has been a prefect, one ought to know how to get at people."

With which she disappeared, and shut the door.

"That girl of mine," thought M. Lejail, "is certainly very wide-awake, and out of the mouth of babes there proceeds wisdom sometimes."

And the reflection made such a modification in his ideas, that he stopped prophesying.

While this talk was going on on the ground-floor, another of the same kind, though a little different, was taking place upstairs. Like her sister, Mme. de la Farlède was drinking Indian tea. Her husband was not roasting himself before a roaring fire; but paying loving attention to one of those old cognacs of finest quality that are miraculous in their operation. A quarter of an hour ago he had been furious, or thought he was; since making acquaintance with this nectar, his temper had visibly improved.

"So you think, my love, that in proposing this toast, M. Trayaz had no intention of insulting me?"

"I'm certain of it."

"Well, in itself there was nothing to be offended at; it was his tone I didn't like. . . . It seemed to me there was a kind of irony, of contempt in his tone. . . ."

"You're mistaken. I'm sure he was sincerely flattered at having the friend of a count at his table."

"True," said M. de la Farlède, strutting about, "he's become more than half American, and we know how Americans are about titles. Well, that's all right! for you know, Blandine, I'm not like my brother-in-law: my honour's dearer to me than my life, and I don't like to have my dignity trifled with. Anyone who makes game of me will get as good as he gives."

In spite of the thickness of the walls, muffled sounds were to be heard at intervals proceeding from the adjoining room. Jules was sleeping like a top, and he had an unfortunate habit of snoring.

"Think of Jules," murmured Mme. de la Farlède.

"Ah, Madame, no one need remind me of my paternal duties. I love my son, and will sacrifice everything for his good, everything but my dignity."

Beside the bottle of cognac was another of kirsch. He wanted to try it, and slowly tasted a few drops, making a horrible grimace afterwards.

"His kirsch isn't as good as his cognac, and if ever he sets my back up I'll tell him so. Yes, my dear, I shall tell him, just as lief as I'd tell you that I think nothing of his kirsch."

There is a story that Napoleon I. kept prisoner in the Tuileries a Councillor of State whom he had impressed for certain work. He was kept under lock and key, but well fed. His friends asked if he did not think this proceeding a little rough on him: "Certainly," he replied, "but I gave the great man tit for tat. He asked me familiarly if I had not found a certain pâté he sent me delicious: Sire, was my answer, it was too salt." Mme. de la Farlède had no fear that her husband ever would imitate the heroic courage of the statesman, and speak to M. Trayaz of his kirsch. She knew him too well not to realise how he venerated millionaires and their millions.

"You know very well," she said, "your dignity is as dear to me as to yourself."

He threw the kirsch into the fire, and came back to the cognac.

"After all," he continued, "I will do your uncle justice. I acknowledge his merits are many. He has plenty of servants, his villa is very comfortable, his cuisine exquisite, his plate magnificent, his stables superb and worthy of a king. My only regret is that in some things his tastes are rather common. Do you know what I mean? The château Comte Destreux lived in was built in Louis XIV.'s time, in 1669. I'm certain, because the Marquise de Niex told me so. What do you think of that, my dear? A man must have a singularly plebeian taste to have pulled down this lordly mansion, to replace it by a house without a history."

"It's so comfortable here!" she answered, curling up in her comfortable chair like some luxurious cat.

"I don't deny it, but all the same, it's deplorable he should be totally devoid of certain feelings. He hasn't the least care for appearances; and yet they have their value. I don't object to the livery his men wear, though it *is* rather dull—but haven't you noticed something here which is rather curious?"

"No."

"Women don't see things like men, after all. I was disgusted to see that your uncle admits at his table that agent, M. Sucquier, who seems to me a very common man, with no manners, and quite unused to society."

His artificial wife looked at him with an air of admiration.

"Hector," said she, "I see in your eyes what you mean, it's a capital idea."

"What do you mean?" he asked, astonished indeed to find anyone could read ideas in his big, round eyes.

"Ah, your idea is that this M. Sucquier, who is allowed to dine with us, will be an important person, a man worth taking notice of, a man you could get a good deal out of."

Though the idea was not his own, it seemed an excellent one.

"*Mon Dieu*," he replied modestly, "we all have our own

special cunning. Have you not often told me I was a born diplomat? . . . . But do you think, Blandine, that I could really enter into conversation with this dependent without loss of dignity? I tell you he's a very common fellow."

"*You'll* know how to set about it, and you may be sure you won't have to make advances long; he'll be too much honoured by the least mark of attention from you."

Then she added in a coaxing voice, pointing to the wall behind which her boy was snoring away:

"Think of Jules!"

"You're right—I will! I'll do the right thing."

Next morning, as M. Sucquier was superintending the digging over of a piece of ground which was to be given up to vine plants, he saw M. Lejail advancing upon him from a distance. It was a very mild day, and the ex-préfet had had no fear of venturing out so early. The agent went to meet him, and they got into talk. M. Lejail was full of fears; fears of taking cold, fears of microbes. He began by asking if the water drunk at La Figuière had been analysed: M. Sucquier gave him his word that in all the country round there was no water as healthy and as pure. His first point satisfactorily settled, they got on to the subject of agriculture generally. M. Sucquier said that the most economical thing to cultivate was the cork-tree, which requires no looking after, and costs nothing but the expense of the barking.

"It only takes a few days," he said: "you pay the workmen about five francs, and the bark grows again in six years. It's calculated that, one thing with another, each foot brings in about a franc a year, and M. Trayaz has more than fifty thousand on his mountain."

The difficulty was to get to the point; though prefects know how to make people talk, M. Lejail found it impossible to make way. Happily he had to do with a man who always came to the rescue of embarrassed inquisitors.

"Yes," he went on, "this property brings in a good bit, and just think of it, even to buy his mountain, and all these fields, and build his big house, M. Trayaz hasn't touched a

penny of his capital, which is all invested in America. He's paid for everything out of his income, and paid at once."

And he exclaimed with a fatherly air:

"What a blessing for a family to possess such an uncle!"

"Oh, excuse me," interrupted M. Lejail hastily, "you must not suspect us of coming here with interested motives. M. Trayaz has emphatically told my mother-in-law that he meant to do nothing for his relations."

"He was joking; he likes making jokes of that kind. I believe I may definitely say—but perhaps I should be wrong. . . ."

"Anything you say will be perfectly safe with me," said M. Lejail, who was beginning to find the agent's conversation deeply interesting.

"Your uncle is devoted to his family, he's a patriarch, his will some day will show it. But that's not all, he's a man who likes making presents in his lifetime. 'Legacies generally come,' he said to me one day, 'when the time for enjoying things is past.' And he said too, 'men who only give away after their death lose the pleasure of seeing the happiness they cause.' People call him hard; he is nothing of the kind."

"You surprise me extremely, my dear Monsieur Sucquier," cried M. Lejail, trying in vain to hide his emotion. "M. Trayaz gave Mme. Limiès to understand that according to the American ideas, which he has adopted, one's family has no claims on one."

"Quite so: when he makes people happy, it's with no idea of performing a duty, and justice will have nothing to do with the legacies he leaves. Those of his family who can manage to please him will be the favoured ones; the others will have just what is due."

His emotions seemed almost too much for him, as he added:

"The lion's share will fall to the one he likes best." But here he seemed to regret his indiscretion in saying so much,

and nothing more was to be got out of him. He was really saying though just what he had been told to say.

M. Lejail went away from him in a very unsettled frame of mind, torn by a hundred different feelings, doubting still, but shaken in his incredulity, ready to admit that it is worth while making experiments sometimes, and resolved to let his wife and daughter go their own way, and as far as in him lay not to interfere with their little manœuvres, but to be as careful in dealing with M. Trayaz, as obliging and as considerate, as was compatible with the care required by his own delicate and well-beloved person.

Two or three hours later, M. de la Farlède had his turn at the agent, who repeated to him in other words exactly what he had said to M. Lejail. But the light-eyed man went further than he had intended; to show his satisfaction to M. Sucquier, he tapped him more than once in most friendly fashion on the shoulder; and as a result of this indiscretion, when M. Sucquier had to leave him and go off to see after some other matters, he held out his fat hand in farewell, and M. de la Farlède had to shake it. He felt his dignity had seriously suffered, and for a little time was much troubled about it, but his delight at what he had heard soon made him forget all about the disagreeable experience.

M. Trayaz was certainly very kind; he wished that his guests should enjoy themselves thoroughly, and told them from the first to consider his house as their own, and do whatever they liked there. He placed at their disposal his horses, carriages, and servants; they gave their orders, and went and came, as they pleased. In the creek was a regular little fleet for their use, a canoe, a long boat, a yawl, pleasure boats and fishing boats, and in the old painter's house fishing lines and traps, and nets. M. de la Farlède was continually using them. At the end of the first week, Huguette received a present from her great-uncle of a pretty little dog-cart and pony, in which she delighted to drive herself about. What specially rejoiced her on receiving it was the thought that it was a kind of earnest of future favours. So that no one might be jealous M. Trayaz gave Jules too a donkey

with quite a fetching set of harness, so that henceforth La Figuière was a regular paradise for that stout boy: no tutor, and a donkey of his own! M. Lejail too had not fared badly. M. Trayaz had found in the old château of 1669 an ancient library, rich especially in historical works, some of which were very rare. Though he himself cared little for reading, he had carefully preserved it, and established it in a big room of the central mass of building, that was reached through the covered gallery. M. Lejail passed many pleasant hours in this library, with its three big sunny windows, and hot-air heating arrangements.

The rest of his time he spent in watching the doings of Mme. Lejail, whose sole idea was to win her uncle's good graces, and oust her sister. Sometimes he would remind her, to supply new ardour for the chase, that "the lion's share will fall to the one he likes best." That's one of the delights of being a sceptic; they don't play themselves, and so see most of the game.

It must be acknowledged that the two women were wonderful; they rivalled each other in attentiveness and serviceableness; never was the zeal of either for a moment relaxed or diverted, never was any old man so pursued with tender looks, so petted and caressed as M. Trayaz by his indefatigable nieces, who were ready to run like young girls if he had left one of his gloves in his room, or wanted a message to be delivered. He seemed to feel these attentions, and replied to them by taking a familiar interest in their concours. What rendered their task difficult was the uncertainty of his temper; but they complied with every caprice; if he was in good spirits, expansive and communicative, they listened devotedly to whatever he said, their eyes seeming to drink in his words. If he was gloomy and preoccupied, they took care to preserve round him a religious silence. If he was inclined to joke and be familiar, their faces took on an expression of delighted responsiveness. If he discharged cruel epigrams, they smiled sweetly, and kissed the rod that smote them.

Their devotion sometimes was heroic. One day, as Mme.

de le Farlède, with her uncle looking on, was helping Jules on to his donkey, it suddenly moved and trod on her foot. It hurt considerably. and she, who generally cried out at nothing, by great self-control managed to make no sound, and when M. Trayaz proposed that she should go for a walk with him in the park, accepted without a word. She suffered agonies, but he never suspected. That very same day, after dinner, he asked Huguette to sing a song he was particularly fond of. Mme. Lejail, who for some hours had been fighting against one of those headaches against which even antipyrine is of no avail, had the courage to sit down and accompany her daughter. M. Lejail said to himself, when he saw it:

"She's marvellous: *Auri sacra fames!*"

Mme. de la Farlède, who was more inventive, though not more zealous than her sister, found an opportunity to mortify her horribly. She was wise enough to talk sometimes with the agent, and found out from him that M. Trayaz was born on the 3d of March, 1830. About the middle of February she sent her husband off to Marseilles, to fetch her a Russia-leather cigar case. This she painted and embroidered with fairy skill, and she had quite a talent for miniature; on one side of the case, which she covered with canvas, she embroidered two branches of almond-blossom and peach-blossom crossed; and in the middle of them inserted an ivory plaque on which she painted her own portrait. This work of art was begun and executed in the most complete secrecy. On the 3d of March, M. Trayaz found the case under his serviette, and was so charmed that he declared he would never part with it. It was a day of triumph for Mme. de la Farlède, a day of confusion for Mme. Lejail. She was made perfectly wretched by the idea that her uncle, who was a great smoker, would have endless occasions for beholding her designing sister's features, and would carry her portrait everywhere with him.

M. Trayaz seemed to delight in exciting the jealousy of the two sisters, appearing to prefer sometimes one, sometimes the other, giving first one and then the other a course of

Yankee compliments, or of chilling coolness, until they knew every alternation of hope and fear. Each in her turn could suppose herself favoured or neglected. When he went for a walk in the park he only allowed one at a time to accompany him, and took the opportunity to make her confide in him or speak ill of the other.

"Now then, Mélanie," said he one day to Mme. Lejail as they paced together a little walk bordered with a double row of cypress and lilac, "haven't you got any secrets to tell me, my dear? All women have secrets—tell me some of yours, just for once."

"I assure you, Uncle, I have none."

"You're not going to make me believe you have no lovers on hand, at any rate."

If anybody else in the world had dared to say such a thing to her, Mme. Lejail would have slapped his face; but there are times when one has to act a part, and people who may say what they please. Mme. Lejail did nothing more than blush and look away.

"Oh, Uncle," she said, with a half smile, "how can you think such things of me?"

"My dear, your husband's so occupied with his health, you must want distractions of some kind sometimes."

"You are right," she answered; "M. Lejail may think himself lucky he hasn't married some women I know."

"Your sister Blandine, for instance?"

"Oh no, Uncle, no. Blandine never entered my head."

"Don't pretend, my dear. She hasn't eyes like that for nothing. Well, since you won't tell me about yourself, tell me about her."

"But how can I, if there's nothing to tell."

"Do as I tell you, child, or your old uncle will be offended." Which terrible threat enabled her to narrate various indiscretions of her sister's younger days—and M. Trayaz's remarks thereon were balm for the wound the cigar case had made, so that for some time she hardly thought of it at all.

Next day, as M. Trayaz and Mme. de la Farlède were

walking up his huge eucalyptus avenue, they met the English pony-cart and its pretty blonde owner, who nodded to her uncle, with a fascinating smile and an air of conquest generally.

"There's no denying," he exclaimed, as she drove on, "that she's a lovely girl!"

"She is very handsome," answered Mme. de la Farlède. "Perfect in every way; in face, figure, shoulders, hands, feet; everything about her is perfect."

"I'll undertake there's a 'but' coming," said M. Trayaz.

"Well, Uncle, there *is* a 'but.' I am very fond of my niece, and I can quite imagine how proud her mother must be of her. But there is just one thing wanting in her."

"What's that?"

"Freshness."

"You are hard to please!"

"Oh, you don't understand. I mean that her girl mind has lost its freshness too soon through calculating reflections, resulting from a youthful selfishness that is wise beyond her years. I think Huguette is too reasonable and reasons too much. She has as much worldly wisdom—and more—than her mother; she says and does nothing without intention; already she calculates everything, and her face shows it, though that doesn't prevent me, you must understand, from liking her."

"I see that, my dear."

"I don't know," she went on, "what they do to young girls now-a-days. Don't you think seventeen is much too soon to begin looking on life as a matter of business?"

"Would you like her to look on it as an adventure?"

"I would like a young girl to have some sentiment in her dreams of the future, to be guided sometimes by her heart. Huguette has too much brain. My Jules has too little, and always will have. He is all heart—and always will be. Think what he said to me the other day! He actually told me he liked his great-uncle better than anyone else, even his mother!"

"He knows I've a weakness for him. But to tell the truth, there's someone else I like even better."

"Who is it?" she asked, in alarm.

"His mother, my dear, his mother to be sure!"

And he looked straight into her eyes.

"Frankly, in spite of your thirty-nine years, you seem to me much more a woman I could fall in love with, than that chit of a girl there driving her pony, and saying nothing without intention. I tell you what. Get rid of your husband by poison or dagger, and I'll marry you. What do you say to that? Of course you think me too old."

"Ah, Uncle," said Mme. de la Farlède, with an expressive look out of her fine eyes, "you are one of those men who never have any age for us women; perhaps I ought not to say so to you; but then I never was as proper as Mélanie."

He pinched her chin at this.

"She's serious enough, your tall sister, with her majestic airs, and heavy brows. But you are a very different kind of little woman, your eyes can tell naughty tales, and I like them for it."

This delighted her—though she was incapable of getting rid of M. de la Farlède by poison or dagger, and knew just how much her uncle's words were worth—or in this case, how little. But they were sweet to her all the same.

The first half of March was so mild that it might have been summer, and one morning M. Trayaz decided, without consulting anyone, that they would take their coffee out of doors. M. Lejail nearly broke into open revolt; a most imperious look from his wife restrained him; and he managed to shorten this terrible trial by proposing a game of billiards to his brother-in-law, the minute he had swallowed his coffee.

The three women stayed out on the terrace with their uncle. He liked lying in a hammock, and had one sent for, and swung between two posts; when he had settled himself in it, he called on Huguette to come and read the paper to him. The work of reading to the great Mogul had devolved upon this young lady, who did it well; if she lacked

freshness of soul, she read clearly, and was very easy to understand. She began reading; her mother listened, and sat watching her; while Mme. de la Farlède, at a little distance, stitched at some embroidery; and Jules, who had been told to be very quiet, stood leaning against the balustrade, staring at the sky and thinking of his donkey.

The cherry and peach trees, still leafless and covered with blossom, were like clouds of white and pink in the meadows; a warm breeze waved about the feathery foliage of the pepper-plants; the great masses of a yellow mimosa in blossom scented the air, as Huguette read the *Petit Marseillais;* and she soon discovered that her uncle had fallen asleep. Her aunt saw it too and stopped embroidering to grasp with her white hands the pendant hammock cord, and swing it as carefully as she might have rocked a baby. Huguette put down her paper, and opened her parasol, which she held over the sleeper's head to keep off a ray of sunshine that was flickering shamelessly from his brow to his chin. So as not to be quite out of it, her mother picked up her fan, and defended with it the august and sacred slumber from sacrilegious flies.

Suddenly Jules was frightened by seeing a big green lizard dart across the balustrade just where his arms were leaning, and gave a piercing scream. M. Trayaz opened his eyes with a start.

"Oh, Jules, what made you cry out like that?" said Mme. Lejail in tones of tragic reproach; for which her sweet sister would have liked to strangle her.

"Don't scold him," said M. Trayaz. "It was worth being roused to see this. How thoughtful you are, my dears, and how delightful it is to have such nieces!"

A smile he had learnt in Dakota in talking to cowboys and prospectors came to his lips, as he looked around at the three women and said:

"You are the flies, and I am the honey-pot."

Mme. Limiès, whose recovery had been slow, arrived at La Figuière by the middle of March. Her rooms were on the first floor, near those of M. and Mme. de la Farlède. As

they included a very big drawing-room, hung with poppy-coloured brocade, it was decided they would all assemble there every evening for tea, as soon as M. Trayaz, who did not drink it, had gone to his rooms.

The very first evening, as soon as their husbands had finished their game of backgammon, Mme. Limiès carried off her daughters into this red drawing-room, and with all the delicacy, all the circumlocutions used by mothers who are willing slaves to their daughters, began a gentle reprimand to them for not being able to get on better together, and indulging in such constant dissension.

"Whoever said such a thing?" they exclaimed together.

"Your uncle himself. He says you are both charming, and that your one fault is you do not care for each other, or get on well together."

Her daughters hastened to justify themselves, and as is usual in such cases, did so by accusing each other, and the defence of both consisted of making charges against her sister. They reproached one another with underhand proceedings, of having in their rivalry slandered the other secretly. After listening patiently, their mother gently insinuated there are generally faults on both sides, and that it takes two to make a quarrel: on which Mme. Lejail declared:

"You have always liked Blandine best," and Mme. de la Farlède protested: "You have always sacrificed me for Mélanie;" and they both began to adduce proofs of their accusations, going back to the days when they were still playing with their dolls.

When they had about exhausted themselves, Mme. Limiès went on again, telling them she had always loved them tenderly and impartially, that they had both always been equally dear to her. Then she reminded them that a divided house cannot stand, and grew hot and eager in her eloquence.

"Let us kiss each other," she said, "and prove to everyone we are one heart and one soul."

And she opened her arms, for which all that she gained

was a peck on her right temple from Mme. Lejail, and another on her left from Mme. de la Farlède. But she had more to tell them, which moved them really to a display of feeling.

"I have bad news for you, girls. I imagined at first that on the strength of information he had obtained, your uncle was only going to interest himself in the elder branch of his family. I was mistaken. He has just told me that he has invited a near relation of yours, whom you hardly know, to come and stay at La Figuière. This relation is your cousin, Casimir Trayaz, son of my late brother Jerome."

"That's bad news," said Mme. Lejail, to whom this seemed serious. "Has he invited the mother too?"

"You forget, dear," replied Mme. Limiès, "that my sister-in-law has been helpless for some time. She is paralysed in her lower limbs, and goes no farther than her garden, where she is wheeled about in an invalid's chair."

At this moment the husbands came in, and she told them the news. M. de la Farlède wasn't much concerned at it.

"Casimir Trayaz!" said he, getting ready his drink. "What, you don't care for that youngster? He's not dangerous. He's never done anything, and never will; your uncle will soon see through him."

Huguette was present but took no part in the talk. She was sitting quietly in a corner, reading Tancred, an English novel she had brought from Le Dattier. Disraeli was her favourite novelist because his heroes and heroines consider indispensable a host of superfluities and accessories more foolish folk manage to do without; because money is in their eyes the first requisite for social power, the universal passport; and because, belonging to the school of millionaire novelists, they drink out of Sèvres cups, and Venetian goblets, and know from babyhood that you must eat butter with truffles. The works of this clever and witty novelist were a source of great delight, and sometimes, it must be confessed, of unhappiness to her, in the solitude of Le Dattier; but she possessed two virtues of theological and Provençal descrip-

tion, faith and hope. She had another gift as well, that of being able to do two things at the same time, to be absorbed in her reading and to hear, without appearance of listening, everything that was being said around her.

She shut her book now and turned to her grandmother: "Granny dear, you know Cousin Casimir better than we do. All I've ever heard of him and his family is that his father was head of a firm of manufacturers of corks, and that competition diminishing his profits, he sold the business, in which we were sleeping partners; and that he deceived us, and paid us less than our share. I know, too, that he had been married not long before that, and that his wife came from Aix, where he finally went to live, and that his only son was to have been a lawyer, but that after his death Casimir instead of going on with his studies, gave up everything and lives with his mother on his small income. When I was a little girl I remember seeing him once or twice, but we have never seen him since and I can't recollect what he is like at all. What sort of person is Cousin Casimir, Granny?"

M. de la Farlède answered for her:

"He's a regular country bumpkin!"

"That tells me nothing. I want to know if he has intelligence, tact, common-sense."

"He's a booby—an idiot."

"Booby, if you like," broke in M. Lejail. "But all the same he has one great advantage over us: he's a Trayaz, and his uncle can't help but prefer one who bears the family name. I've noticed many a time that such considerations have a good deal of influence on the decisions and wishes of testators and donors."

"That's just like you," his brother-in-law informed him. "You're always afraid of something."

"If papa is an incorrigible pessimist," joined in Huguette, "you are rather too optimistic always, you know, Uncle. My theory is that in life, as at hunting, you make a mistake if you underrate your enemies, and are likely to come off badly if you do."

"Impertinent girl!" exclaimed M. de la Farlède. "I'll teach you to talk to me in that way."

But she was not easily dismayed; and came and sat down in the middle of the circle. Looking round at them all in turn, this young sibyl said:

"What does it matter whether we love each other or not? It's so easy to pretend we are quite devoted. And if we're sensible we'll agree to forget differences and band together against the common enemy, in defence of the butter dish."

Her father was always amused by her daring sayings, and her precocious wisdom, and often admired, as much as he wondered at her.

"Bravo, Huguette!" he said. "What your style lacks in elegance, it makes up for in force, and there's a ring of common-sense in your phrases. It's good advice, child; the history of the world shows that there's nothing like a foreign war for healing intestine quarrels."

This broke up the sitting. As a fact, the two sisters didn't kiss as they said good-night, but they shook hands, and in the days that followed, they managed to be amiable together, and almost to look as if they loved each other.

There's always a certain element of truth and of falsehood in family condemnations. If Casimir Trayaz might be classed, without injustice, among the idle and unoccupied, it was a calumny to say, as M. de la Farlède did, that he was a good-for-nothing. He had brains enough, and had he wished, would have done as well as anyone; what he lacked was ambition. He was of that type of the provincials, in possession of a small income, who prize highly negative enjoyments, a class of pleasures almost unknown in Paris, where everyone lives at high pressure. To be dependent on no one, to take orders from no one, to have all his time at his own disposal, employ his days as he liked, and never feel the hard spur of necessity, that was all Casimir asked to be happy.

The idle get bored sometimes: this one never did. He had no end of interests; was concerned in all sorts of so-

ciety intrigues, and thoroughly enjoyed the gossip of the day. Women's little affairs claimed much of his attention, and more than one woman had had cause to be grateful to him. He was so sensible too, that his passions had never been able to get him into trouble. It was his rule to live conscientiously on his little income, without ever touching his capital; he never allowed play or love affairs to make a hole in that; and this self-restraint was no result of parsimoniousness, but of love of a liberty he did not care to expose to risks. Once only he had been in danger of losing it, for the sake of a lovely Italian he fell in love with at a watering-place; he arranged to go and see her in Venice, and took a three months' course of Italian lessons, so it must have been pretty serious. But at the moment of starting, he changed his mind; and after much reflection decided to stay at Aix, where time cured him of his passion. But even in the provinces one can not be continuously and completely happy, and there were days when this handsome young man told himself that to be worth anything the profession of do-nothing must have money to set it off, and dear as his liberty was to him, there were moments when he dreamed of marrying an heiress and making a figure in the world.

His uncle's letter opened new horizons to him; and this unexpected invitation seemed a windfall he would be a fool not to make the most of. When his packing was done, he told his mother, who was miserable because she could not go with him:

"I wish you could come—but not because I want your help. The more I think of it, the more it seems to me there's something to be done over there, and I'll do my best to turn this way a little stream, if not the main current, of that American Pactolus."

And when she shook her head at him despondingly:

"Do you think I'm too stupid or too clumsy?"

"Nothing of that kind, dear lad. But your father used often to tell me, what you wanted were will and concentration; that you were incapable of sticking to one idea and

following it out for two weeks running. What I fear is that something will come and divert you."

She knew him thoroughly. To an ardent imagination, he added great variableness of character. He had all the characteristics of his country, where the beauty of the sky tempts a man to let things go, and where forgetfulness is as easy as desire. Though a good shot, he often came home from a shooting expedition with his bag empty—something had diverted him on the way, a petticoat most probably. And he had thought no more of game.

"You'll see!" he answered. "This time I'll prove that on great occasions I have a will, and can stick to things."

His arrival at La Figuière a few minutes before déjeûner was accompanied by an unlucky accident that might have seemed a bad omen, if he had been superstitious. When the carriage which had fetched him from the station at Bormes stopped at the steps of the villa, he saw in the distance his uncle coming along the terrace to meet him. Carried away by his zeal, he began to get out in such a hurry that he fell full length. But he was up in a moment and joked so good-humouredly about his clumsiness, and the folly of being too eager about things, that M. de la Farlède, who had witnessed his fall, and was quite ready to make fun of it, was reduced to silence. There are some who come well out of their misfortunes; he hadn't a single scratch, only a few spots of mud on his jacket. M. Trayaz gave him fifteen minutes to change; and his opponents hoped that this young man, who seemed to be very particular about his dress, would forget the time over his toilet, and so lose the very first stroke of the game, for his uncle hated waiting. He did nothing of the kind: the bell had hardly rung when he appeared again, washed and combed, attired from head to foot with perfect good taste, with elegance as well as neatness, and they had to confess that he dressed well and dressed quickly.

During déjeûner, Huguette watched him from the corner of her eyes, examined him and picked him completely to pieces. She noticed at once that if the hair was beginning

to grow thin on his temples, his complexion was clear and fresh. She did justice not only to his neck-tie, and the cut of his jacket, but to the brightness of his eyes, his attractive looks, his fine moustache, and well-kept hands.

"What a pity," she thought, "that such a nice man should be such a poor match!"

Soon she noticed that M. Trayaz looked at him often and addressed much of his conversation to him, and that he replied with a kind of respectful familiarity that evidently pleased the tyrant; from which she concluded that her uncle Hector was a fool, and that the elder branch had a formidable rival in this new-comer.

Towards the end of the meal, when a drive was proposed for the afternoon, M. Lejail made the objection that the sky was clouding over, and that the sun had disappeared behind a black mass.

"The sun?" said M. Trayaz, "why, here it is!" And he pointed to his radiant and triumphant nephew.

He refused to go with them, and leaning on Casimir's arm, followed by his English mastiff, to whom he had given the name of Wasp, the only being to whom he pardoned everything, went to look after some work he was interested in. The little river which ran through his domains, though often dried up in fine weather, became a regular devastating torrent in seasons of wet; he had determined to fortify its banks, even in one place alter its course, and build again a bridge it had carried away the winter before. This work fascinated him; a stream that did damage on his lands was in his eyes a rebel, whose insolence he swore to reduce to obedience, to bring into submission to his powerful will. It was a kind of pleasure his life had often afforded him; men or rivers, he liked to get the better of all that dared to resist him.

He spent the afternoon in giving orders to his workmen, and chatting now with Casimir, now with Wasp. Next day, and the days following, it was the same.

"Let's go and see if those gentlemen are at work," he would say to his nephew.

He never got tired of his society. He rather liked gossip, and made him talk of himself, and tell him all the scandal of Aix. Often, too, he chaffed him, and called him the king of do-nothings. Casimir was very good-tempered; he never got angry, took everything in good part. Sometimes even he flattered his uncle, but without cringing or toadyism, his compliments were in perfect good taste. Once M. Trayaz having said to him:

"You're by no means a fool, but you've got just the sort of sense that's of no use at all," he replied: "my dear Uncle, I only wish I had the useful kind; unfortunately there's never more than one man of genius in a family at a time, and when I came into the world, the place was taken."

From the windows of the *salon* Mme. Limiès and her daughters could watch for hours these two men in the distance always talking with animation. These long tête-à-têtes were tortures to them: how many things can be said in one afternoon! M. Trayaz seemed to have forgotten the existence of his nieces; he hardly spoke to them, hardly seemed to see them. They mourned in concert over the caprices of this ungrateful uncle: they gave themselves up to bitter reflections which they imparted to each other, so near together had they been brought by their common discomfiture. Forced by the evidence of his senses to give in, M. de la Farlède himself could doubt no longer that the intruder, as they called him, was in favour.

"Certainly you didn't do him justice," said his brother-in-law: "he's everything here at present."

And yet his uncle's preference had not been able to turn Casimir's head, and he never thought for a moment of using it to mortify or humiliate any one. Not having consulted M. Sucquier, he had not learnt from him that in this kingdom many would be called but few chosen; some would be debased that others might be exalted. Indeed he was naturally kind-hearted, and wished no one ill. He thought that if the source is an abundant one, everybody may drink from it, and he was astonished at the long faces he met. In M. Trayaz's presence they made much of him; to treat him

with coldness the minute the master's back was turned. He tried in vain to be agreeable, they took no notice of his funny stories, would not laugh at his jokes, kept him at a distance; would not even ask him in to tea in the Red Drawing Room, whose door remained obstinately closed to him.

He gave in at last and acknowledged that his dear relations were in league against him, and accepted it cheerfully, as he accepted everything. But why was Huguette in the conspiracy? She and he were just made to get on together. When he first saw this pretty cousin of his whom he had last seen as a little girl, whose very face he had forgotten, he said to himself that in this world Providence takes care always to have the reward ready at hand after the pains. He had left everything to do his duty, and set to work to conquer the good-will of a grim, ironical old man, and by the special favour of Heaven, he found in the house of his bondage a charming young girl, who did not look as though she would be difficult to get on with. If she would have been the least little bit friendly, he might have had such delightful days at La Figuière, and if in the evenings his thoughts centred obstinately in this Red Drawing Room where he was pitilessly refused admission, it was because he imagined he could see and hear her behind this inexorable door. Alas, she also treated him rigorously, as an enemy; and by turns haughty and scornful, seemed to say: "You are losing your time, I'm not a bird to be easily taken."

M. Trayaz had been careless about himself: every day, from whatever quarter the wind was blowing, he spent hours in superintending his workmen. One evening he came in pale and shivering, and by night was in a fever. They sent for the doctor, who said it was only a feverish cold, but that it might easily develop into influenza, and that influenza is dangerous when there's anything wrong with the heart. He prescribed for him, and ordered him to stay in bed. This event turned the whole villa upside down; everyone was in a state of agitation and alarm.

M. Lejail alone kept calm; he was more sceptical about anyone else's ease than his own.

"He'll get over it," he said, "and perhaps in future will be less contemptuous of overcoats and those who wear them."

For Mme. Limiès and her daughters it was a signal return to favour; when a man is ill, he pins his faith to his women folk. Two weeks ago, Mme. Lejail and her sister would have quarreled irremediably over the honour of acting sick-nurse to their uncle; now everything was settled most amicably; they took turn and turn about at the bedside, and relieved each other graciously in the task of amusing the pale invalid, and serving up his *tisane*.

They would have liked to sit up with him, but he would not allow it. Still on alternate nights they got up every two hours to give him a dose of aconite and antimony he was ordered to take. When they had got over their first alarm they blessed the accident which had brought them into favour again. As women are always disposed to abuse their good fortunes, Casimir, having twice asked to see his uncle, was haughtily told he was in need of repose, and the too favoured nephew was shut out.

Not knowing what to do with himself, nor having anyone to speak to, Casimir began to get terribly bored in this house where he could not get a word out of anyone; and one day resolved to pay a visit to Lavandon.

It is rather less than three quarters of an hour's walk from La Figuière. To get there you round a slight elevation, covered with flowering heath and lentisks, which brings you out on a beach about a mile and a half long. Don't make the mistake though of trying to walk there along the shore: there is nothing more tiring than walking on fine sand, where the foot sinks in at each step, and don't try to walk over the meadows watered by the river Bataillier: you would be stopped again and again by wide muddy ditches. Leave these marshy meadows on your left, and you will find the path you ought to take. Narrow, pebbly, winding, but charming, it is bordered by high hedges, and even in some

places by great beds of purslain, rearing in the sunshine their lovely blossoms of vivid pink or gleaming yellow, of which one might say, as of the lilies in the Gospel, that they are more magnificently clothed than Solomon in all his glory.

What Casimir found at Lavandon has never been known; what mysterious attraction induced him to return there again has never been known either. What is certain is that for a whole week he spent the half of each day there, and that one evening he did not get back to dinner: only returning long after everyone was in bed, as Mme. de la Farlède, whose rooms were over his, and who, like Huguette, had very acute hearing, was able to tell the others.

The conspirators held a council of war, and decided that the common enemy had forgotten himself, and been guilty of a mistake they could use against him, and as usual, Mme. Limiès was charged to open the campaign, and discharge the first shot. M. Trayaz was now out of bed, and came down every day into the *salon*. She made use of the first moment she was left alone with him to bring the conversation round to Casimir; she spoke highly of him, with some timid reservations; but gained courage as she went on, and every minute he grew blacker in her hands. M. Trayaz listened placidly, without making any observations himself. Encouraged by his silence, which she took for approbation, Mme. Limiès brought out her big weapon, and told how for a week their nephew had been going backwards and forwards to Lavandon, that his conduct was most mysterious, and that the servants were talking about it.

"I know," said she, "that young folk will be young folk; but they should know when it is fitting for them to be bent on their own amusements and when it is not. It seems to me Casimir has been wanting in respect for the house where he is a guest, in thinking only of his own pleasure, at a time when we were all so worried and anxious about your health."

He leant over to pat his dog who was lying at his feet. Then he looked up, a frown on his brow, his long pointed nose in the air, and said: "I don't know what this young

man has done to you; there's not one of you can say a good word for him. Spite of you all, I like him just as he is; leave him alone, and don't spoil my pleasure in him for me."

She was quite taken aback by this reply, and so were her daughters when she acquainted them with her pitiful failure.

"He's master of the situation," said Mme. Lejail.

"Bah!" said M. de la Farlède. "He's made one mistake—his next will do for him."

"Don't you rely on that," replied the ex-préfet. "An all-merciful Providence has provided dogs for blind men, and repentance for those who have erred."

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT day, her husband lying late in bed, Mme. Lejail rose early and went into her daughter's room where she found her writing to a school-friend, one of those intimate friends who are told everything, on condition, of course, that they repeat nothing. Waiting for her to finish, her mother sat down on the window seat to watch with melancholy eyes a big magnolia-tree that the mistral had stripped of half its flowers; perhaps she was remarking to herself that our biggest hopes are like these flowering trees, and a caprice of the skies suffices to lay them bare.

As a rule Huguette could fill two sheets with her elegant scrawl in less than fifteen minutes. To-day she was *distraite* and inspiration would not come; she put down her pen, and seemed to be communing with herself.

Suddenly she turned to her mother:

"So, Mamma, you think it's settled, my uncle is quite infatuated with this handsome young man."

"I am of your father's opinion," replied Mme. Lejail, "that a spirit of contradiction is your uncle's strongest characteristic, and that all we could say or do against this fancy of his would only anchor it the more securely in his granite mind."

"Well, circumstances alter cases. I'm very much deceived, or my cousin has rather a fancy for me. Although I have been so distant to him, he looks at me sometimes in a way that is half tenderness, half reproachfulness. What would you say if henceforth . . . ."

Mme. Lejail's finger was on her lip. She had guessed the thought in her daughter's mind, it had even entered her own, but she had fought against it as a temptation to be resisted.

"Ah, mamma, nothing is easier in this case than to turn right round and replace hatred by affection. It's often done, and who's to prevent it now . . . ?"

"Loyalty to a treaty, my darling. We are allied, your aunt and I, by a tacit agreement. We have undertaken to join forces, not to act separately; it's a matter of conscience with me . . . ."

"Loyalty to treaties!" interrupted Huguette, who scorned vain scruples. "Didn't papa say the other day, in speaking of the Triple Alliance, that the powers only keep up an alliance as long as it is to their advantage to do so?"

Mme. Lejail was silent.

"Silence means assent," went on Huguette, "and there's another proverb that says: 'Nothing venture, nothing have.'"

"I don't understand you, dear," said her mother, affecting non-comprehension.

"Well, you'll understand before déjêuner to day, for I mean to settle this little matter at once. Whatever may be the merit of the ripe, black olives that fall of themselves, the best oil is made from the green ones picked by oneself from the tree."

And she shut up her blotting book, and changed from her dressing-gown into a pretty frock of yellow foulard, put on a big straw hat, and taking in one hand her parasol, in the other a big book, she courtesied to her mother, who had watched these preparations without saying a word.

"Huguette, you're mad to think of it."

"I—no. I never do anything without careful consideration."

"Well, where are you going, at any rate?"

"I'm going to find out at once if my cousin really cares for me."

"And you're going up to his room to enquire?"

"Ah, what do you take me for?"

Then, with a glance at the clock: "He's not down yet, but he will be out in half-an-hour."

And she turned to go. Mme. Lejail tried to detain her.

"Can't you trust me?" she asked.

"Of course, my dear. But do be careful. Oh, do be careful."

She shrugged her shoulders at such a superfluous injunction, and disappeared.

After having been the victim of one of those cross-current ideas his mother had feared for him, Casimir had returned, according to himself, to the thorny path of duty. He had resolved to sacrifice his pleasures, and devote himself body and soul to his uncle, to abandon the agreeable for the useful. But there are some amusements a sincere penitent can allow himself without remorseful feelings. Having spent the first twenty years of his life on the shores of the Mediterranean, the sea was to him an old friend of his childhood he was delighted to renew acquaintance with. It had for him the charm women have, that of continual change and mutability. Since M. Trayaz had been ill, and he had not had to accompany him every morning to watch the embankment operations at the riverside, he had got into the habit of going out for a sail every day before déjêuner. Huguette knew this, as she knew most things.

As she had predicted, he came out about ten and made straight for the creek, meditating on the good and evil chances of this life. He was not a man to philosophise long, preferring to declaim verse aloud, especially his own. He was a prolific maker of verses, in French and in Provençal. Whatever other merits he lacked, he had abundance, and prodigious facility, and improvised sonnets on the spur of the moment; his favourite verses were ballads embodying some adventure of his own, which he called his

rhymed diary. As he came up to the old painter's house, he was reciting one of these ballads at the top of his voice, when he suddenly perceived that the beach was not deserted as usual, but that a young lady in yellow foulard was sitting on a mound of sand, which a big fir-tree sheltered from the sun.

"Why, there's Huguette," he muttered to himself, wishing his voice had not been quite so loud.

But there was no need for him to trouble himself. Bending over an open book she was holding with both hands, she was so absorbed in her reading, she could hardly have heard anything, and when he addressed her, humbly as a dog that has been whipped, and fears he may be whipped again, she gave a little cry of surprise. But at that very moment he discovered the book she had been so deeply interested in was upside down.

"She is very cunning," he said to himself, "she was expecting me."

And this confirmed him in his idea that she had been acting under orders in her harsh treatment of him.

"*Ma cousine*," he said, "I was just meditating on the unfortunate things that are always happening. Sometimes though there must be lucky chances, as well as unlucky, since I have chanced upon you here."

"It was so gloriously fine," she answered, "I could not resist the temptation of coming down here to breath the sea-air."

"You are breathing it at too great a distance. *Ma cousine*, I belong to a bold race. If you would consent to tear yourself away from your book, I would propose a sail together: would you come?"

She answered in severe tones so that he might understand she was surprised at his proposal; but her smile told a different tale from her words.

"What will they say, *mon cousin?*"

"If it pleases you and me to go, I don't see what *they* have got to say about it. . . . I'm going to get the canoe ready."

A shout soon told her he was ready. A few minutes later they started. She sat in the stern, telling him to look after the sail, she would see to the steering. She understood steering pretty thoroughly; it was her only amusement at Le Dattier. The sea, which reflected a dappled sky, was full of loveliest opal lights, and wonderfully calm; but they had little thought of its beauty. As soon as they were out of the creek the wind freshened, the sails swelled out, and they had every now and then to tack. Casimir chatted to Huguette of her daily life; she confided to him her favourite occupations, how bored she got sometimes, and how she had enjoyed herself at Marseilles with her grandmother. As he listened he decided that this young heart was just ripe for love and marriage. Little by little there began to take possession of him the very emotions he had felt the first time he had seen the lovely Italian. Women and wine had the same effect upon him, producing a kind of intoxication at the first draught, but never making him completely lose his head.

After watching her for some moments in silence, he exclaimed: "*Mon Dieu, ma cousine*, how have you managed to be so lovely?"

"That isn't managed at all," she laughed, without a shade of heightened colour.

"I am a transparent man, and could never hide my feelings from you. You must have noticed long ago how much I care for you. . . . but what are you laughing at?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, but you were."

"I was thinking of something mamma said."

"What did she say?"

"The day you didn't get in for dinner she said you had lost your heart to some one in Lavandon."

He had none of her effrontery, and could not help reddening, but soon recovered and said:

"My heart—ah, my heart wasn't there at all. I swear. . . . well, since you force me to confess, I will tell you, that your cruelty made me so wretched, I used to walk it off in long

tramps over the Maures mountains. That evening I lost my way, and couldn't get back to La Figuière."

"And what is more likely still, we shall be late for déjeûner if we don't put back at once," she answered.

"Oh, how dreadfully sensible you are! how I wish I could make you feel for once what I feel! Can you believe it, I was seriously thinking of carrying you off right away to the island of Levant. There are plenty of charming little deserts there, where I could tell you some of the things that for the present have to remain unsaid."

"No need for that! it seems to me we are about as much alone as we could ever be, and that whatever you choose to say, I must listen to."

The breeze had gone down, and the sail hung slack; he took the oars and began to row gently.

"Oh, all ye deities of the ocean," he exclaimed, "chubby Tritons, and solemn Amphitrite, guide my tongue and give me words to touch the heart of this adorable girl who is floating on your waves!"

"That's quite enough of exordium," she said; "get on."

"Do you remember, *ma cousine*, that years ago, when I was a boy and you a baby girl, I spent a whole week with your parents when they were living at Saint-Raphaël, before your father had discovered it was a fatal spot for an ex-préfet anxious about his health? Then, as now, I was ten years older than you, and you ordered me about as you pleased. One day you said to me, 'Let us play at being married . . .' and putting a rake on my shoulder told me: 'Go off to work now, husband; when you come back I'll have a delicious hot cake ready for you, and I'll cook it all my very own self.' I don't remember if the cake was delicious, but I know I eat it. Do you remember, *ma cousine?*"

"Supposing I do—what then? But do row faster, we shall never be in time."

"Your father found out our game, and told us to play at something else. He thought of course no one but a crowned king was worthy to wed you, and he was right; but alas, there are no crowned kings at Le Dattier, or at Saint-

Raphaël. And then, too, at that time I was the owner of a very obscure name: things have changed since then. The family has its big man, spoken of with veneration for twenty leagues round. Now a woman may be proud of being known as Mme. Casimir Trayaz. What do you say, *ma cousine?*"

"I think you're rather a long-winded story-teller, *mon cousin;* I always look straight away at the ending of my novels, and I'm impatient for the end of your story."

"The end is coming. Do you think that when I have the honour to ask your father for your hand he will reproach me again with my choice of the games I play?"

"How very precipitate you are! Don't I count for anything in the matter? It seems to me it might be worth while to ask my consent first."

"Will you consent, *ma cousine?*"

"I must know you first before I answer that question; I don't know you at all yet."

"Do you want to know more of me to know whether you like me or not? Be kind, and confess you like me? Do you know Italian, *ma cousine?*"

"No, *mon cousin.*"

"Then I'll risk a quotation: *La donna ricasa e brama.*"

"Which means," retorted this acute young lady, who had no need to have studied a language to be able to understand it, "that the woman refuses, and desires what she refuses. How conceited you are!"

"How can you say so? I only do myself justice; it's the cake of our childish game I lack . . . though I don't mean the one you made me eat."

"No, you mean the one we can not be happy without," she said with a half sigh.

"Happily we know where it is to be got. Let us change our metaphor. Our uncle holds the purse-strings. To speak the truth, this old ram with its golden fleece doesn't look to me a particularly inviting bit of shearing. But I venture to think he likes me, and thinks you are charming, and that

the day we inform him of our intentions he will deign to shake over us some tufts of his golden wool."

"And thereupon," she said, "they landed."

And it so happened that at that precise moment the canoe had reached the little landing place near the painter's terrace.

"Before I help you out, say one kind word. Tell me that from to-day you will allow me to hope."

"I won't say yes or no."

"When a woman doesn't say no, she means yes. *Ma cousine*, I am a beggar at your gates; vouchsafe me one little alms that will not bind you to anything, and in this quiet place where only the Tritons can see us, risk making them jealous, and allow your cousin one little kiss on those lovely blue eyes."

"No, nothing of that kind," she exclaimed, rising; "I won't have that."

He did not insist, and got out to help her to land. Then, before she could guess his intention, he had put his lips to a lock of her hair, whose lovely yellow was very rare in Provence, as he lifted her down.

"You are a faithless, lawless creature!" she said sharply, but not angrily.

And leaving him to moor the boat, she ran off.

"You may run now, young lady; you'll be back again before long," he said between his teeth. "What a downright coquette you are, and what fun I shall have with you yet! I shan't have much chance of getting bored at La Figuière with you there; and Heavens! however devoted one may be to one's duty, it's impossible to talk to one's uncle *all* day long."

A few minutes before déjeûner, Huguette rushed into her mother's room to tell her.

"I do believe it's all settled," and without stopping to take breath, she told her story.

"I think it's your turn now; you ought to sound my uncle, and find out what he's disposed to do for me, and his favourite nephew. Until you've done that I shall not

know how to treat this young man, though I like him very much."

She begged her mother to lose no time telling her; uncertainty of any kind was what she most hated. Mme. Lejail was anxious enough to satisfy her, but it seemed to her she was undertaking a dangerous piece of work.

There are men who at first sight seem alarming, who on further acquaintance prove more accessible and easy to deal with than they appeared. Others are like mountains whose sides look all smooth and grassy, and covered with lovely flowers; there is nothing to warn the beholder that these flowery slopes lead to invisible precipices, lying in wait for the unwary. Through all the first weeks of their stay at La Figuière, charmed by their uncle's amiability, Mme. Lejail and her sister could not understand their mother's alarm at him. But one day he smiled at them, and said: "You are the flies, I am the honey;" and that smile sent a cold shiver through them; they had seen the precipice.

In spite of her daughter's urging, Mme. Lejail was in no hurry to accomplish her mission, and several days elapsed without her daring to approach the delicate subject. According to all appearances, she might not have done so then, if it had not happened one day that her uncle met her alone in one of the garden walks, and said brusquely:

"Ah, I've been hearing some strange things. How long is it since you took to allowing your daughter to go out boating alone with a young man? You must feel pretty sure of them both."

She was astonished that he knew all about it; for she had no idea that one morning when M. Sucquier was at work tracing out a road that was to be cut through a wood, he had seen the canoe from the top of a hill; and that as his numerous merits included that of being an excellent detective, his zeal in this direction procuring him not merely the consideration but the good-will of his master, who was not at all displeased that his agent managed to see everything that was going on, and bring him news of it.

"My word!" went on M. Trayaz, "what strange things

women are! One day your mother comes straight from you to tell me my nephew is a wild young fellow, that he is wanting in respect for my house, that his escapades are scandalising my guests and my servants, and that I ought to ask him at once to quit the place, and the very next day Mlle. Lejail goes out alone to spend two hours with this worthless young man on the water!"

For a moment she was utterly taken aback; some contradictions seem so irreconcilable; but she had learnt in her experience of official life never to lose countenance.

"Dear Uncle," she said, "women are often too hasty in their conclusions. We were unjust to Casimir. We have learnt since that he was not doing what we thought at Lavandon, that he is a great walker and used to go for tramps over the mountains, and that one evening . . . ."

"Do you think I'm an idiot?" he interrupted. "Why not confess that sometimes Huguette has quite an American way of doing things without consulting you at all?"

"It was a most innocent expedition; they met on the beach, and as Huguette is still only a child . . ."

"So you say, but we find old heads on pretty young shoulders sometimes."

He added in a milder tone:

"I thought I noticed there was a pretty strong attraction for Casimir in that quarter. You should be careful."

"He is perfectly straightforward; he has made her a declaration quite *en règle*, and I expect before long will ask us formally for her hand. I wanted to consult you about it. What do you think I ought to do? I should like to carry out your wishes entirely in the matter. It's not only that your advice is always sound, but I look on you as the head of the family."

"You honour me highly," he replied with a sneer, "and to be honoured in that way means you are expected to pay expenses. What's your own private opinion of my fine nephew?"

"I don't dislike him at all, and it seems to me you like him."

"What makes you think I like him? He amuses me, and is certainly very good company; but as a rule your amusing men are not particularly good husbands, and since you really want my advice, I tell you Huguette's not nearly old enough to think of marrying yet; don't be in a hurry to get her settled, and whatever you do, take care you don't hand her over to that humbug."

This categorical reply, so different from what she had expected and desired, gave her quite a shock, but she managed to conceal it.

"Thanks, dear Uncle," she said, "my mind is now quite made up, and Huguette has so much affection and respect for you that your advice will be a command for her."

After which, having found out what she wanted to know, she changed the subject. As may be imagined, she told no one but her daughter of the talk with this inscrutable man, whose sudden changes of face upset all calculations. But she saw no reason why she should not tell her sister that if ever their uncle had had a fancy for their cousin, he had quite got over it, since he called him a wag and a humbug. As they no longer deemed him dangerous, his relations began to treat him more humanely, in fact to be quite amiable, and relax his quarantine. He was delighted at this, but noticed at the same time that his uncle's manner to him was much cooler, and that Huguette had again suddenly become a bird very difficult to approach. He told himself M. Trayaz was the most capricious of old men, that it's no use fighting against caprices, which can be both pleasant and disagreeable, so that it is wiser to let the disagreeable ones wear themselves out, and the pleasant ones revive again, while patience and hope are two powerful divinities, which can set things right for us, spite of adverse things and men. Where Huguette was concerned, though, he did not resign himself to this waiting policy of indolent wisdom and folded arms. He swore he would have the best of this coquette, and her inexplicable changes of humour, that he would vanquish this hard fantastic heart, which was now so alluring, now so distant. And to

this, after a very summary disposal of his duties to his uncle, he devoted his days. Once more in his life he sacrificed what was of main importance, for an accessory, and became so excited over the game that he very nearly forgot for what purpose he had come to La Figuière.

One evening, the two men and four ladies collected in the Red Drawing Room heard a knock at the door, and before anyone had called out "Come in!" they saw to their great surprise that it was the handsome fellow they had so long excluded from the altar and the sacrifice, who was thus entering the sanctuary. He came in, with a perfectly indifferent manner, and an assurance that was well bred and becoming. He was received politely, but without enthusiasm. Before sitting down, he looked round, and said: "This then is the famous Red Drawing Room, the very room to make conspiracies in!"

"You call us conspirators?" said Mme. Limiès.

"My dear Aunt," he replied, "I'm accused of being thoughtless—it's pure calumny—I'm an observer and I understand. Let us show each other our hands for a moment. You and I have for the man who owns this house and no end of other property, real and personal, an attachment as deep as it is sincere. But let us be frank and confess that this affection has nothing in common with that mystic love which despises rewards, and prefers the happiness of loving to the joys of Paradise. You thought I was the enemy of your interests; you were mistaken."

And he added in a prophetic tone, slapping his chest: "Their enemy is not here, he is on the way here!"

These alarming words and the manner in which they were spoken made a great impression on all present. They begged him to explain.

"The man on his way here, and with whom you will have before long to reckon, is the son of my late aunt Marian, younger sister of my aunt Mme. Limiès here, cousin Silvère Sauvagin."

"What!" said Mme. Limiès with astonishment, "is my brother sending for Silvère?"

"What!" exclaimed M. de la Farlède, scornfully, "this *déclassé!* under-gardener of Mme. la Comtesse de Rins! And you are afraid of him? You take this scarecrow seriously? You must be joking, Casimir."

"Allow me to tell you that this *déclassé*, it appears, is getting on in the world. I know nothing of him, but M. Trayaz, who, I think, must get his information from Sucquier, and knows more about all the affairs of the family than any of us, says that he has got to be head-gardener, professor of botany, confidential man, and general factotum of the *comtesse* and her boarders."

"What are you thinking of?" cried M. de la Farlède, who could not bear to hear anyone speaking lightly of a *comtesse*, and who felt called upon to defend against a humbugging fellow the honour of the French nobility. "You'll never make me believe that Mme. de Rins has at her table the man who rakes her paths for her. Do you mean to tell us . . . ."

"Don't put things into my mouth that I never said. I only say that if Silvère ever has raked the paths, he does so no longer, and she has found out his value. You forget how he fagged over his books before he took to the rake and the hoe. What a queer fellow he is! After all his brilliant career at the Marseilles college, to think it no disgrace to enter the service of the woman who owns the finest garden in Hyères. Silvère Sauvagin is a bachelor of arts turned gardener for love!"

"For love?" exclaimed Huguette, who as usual was sitting apart, reading Tancred.

"For love of his flowers, *ma cousine:* by all accounts it's the only kind of love he knows."

"What a pity!" she said. "I was beginning to think him so interesting."

"It would be more correct to say," broke in M. de la Farlède, "that your Silvère turned gardener because his father was ruined, and didn't leave him a penny, and that in every family there are some members who don't care in what work they engage, so little feeling have they. I am

perfectly convinced," he added, bridling, "that M. Christophe Trayaz will never care for any of his relations whose kinship is not an honour to him."

"You had better undeceive yourself, my dear cousin. M. Christophe Trayaz likes to have about him attentive and obliging ears, into which he can whisper the small number of his secrets he destines for exportation. This afternoon he chose your humble servant to confide in, and I believe I am doing what he wished in repeating faithfully to you what he did me the favour of telling me. Would you like to know which of his nephews he invited first, before any of us here, to come and eat salt with him? Silvère Sauvagin. There are not many fools whose folly goes so far as to reject the advances of an uncle who has more than two millions of money and no children. I only know one: Silvère Sauvagin. What were his motives? To be eccentric, a bear—or profoundly polite? I can't tell. He said he was too busy to leave Hyères. But the most astonishing part of it is, M. Trayaz was not discouraged, he returned to the charge, and sent a second invitation, which has been accepted . . . .

"And do you know, dear Aunt," he continued, turning to Mme. Limiès, "why my uncle sets such store by this son of your sister Marianne? It's because she alone believed in his genius. When he went to America, before she was married, she urged him to take with him half her little fortune, saying she knew she could not do better with her money. He would not accept her offers, but he remembers them."

"It's a very natural feeling," said M. Lejail. "The Emperor Napoleon III. was always particularly attached to anyone who had believed in his future at a time when wise men were calling him a visionary and adventurer."

"It is my fault, my dear children," said Mme. Limiès contritely; "I had no faith in those days."

"You ought to have had!" said her daughters in a hard voice.

"One more word!" went on Casimir. "If you still doubt that during his visit here Silvère is going to be treated

as none of us ever will be, listen to this: This young man, who seems very much at his ease with my uncle, has written that he can not get here till the evening train, and my uncle has decided that on account of this bear, or this diplomat, whichever he is, he will dine an hour later."

This last argument had more effect than any of the others. Even M. de la Farlède grew anxious.

"Yes," exclaimed Casimir, "things are very serious; we must prepare for the worst."

"What I am prepared for," said Mme. Limiès, whose heart was heavy at her daughters' reproaches, "is that Silvère won't be here two days before he has fallen out with his uncle. When he was studying at Marseilles, I used to have him at my house sometimes: I liked him well enough, though he was always rather odd. When I saw him again at his father's funeral, I disliked him very much, he was so aggressive and disagreeable and uncomfortable."

"That's no reason, aunt, why my uncle should dislike him; it will be a change for him; he is beginning to get rather sick of the more ordinary charms of relations like ourselves, our supple knees and flexible spines: to have a savage to tame will be quite a joy for him. We must keep our lamps trimmed; your interests and mine are one in this matter; let us be on the watch."

He was very pleased with himself; he had had his revenge on his dear relations, in telling them this disagreeable and alarming news, and had constrained them at the same time to accept him as one of themselves.

While they were arguing over his tidings, he succeeded in getting round to the little table at which Huguette was seated. "I have not lost my time," he said. "It's no longer a triple alliance, it's a quadruple one, and includes me. Henceforth I have my admission to the *salon* where my queen spends her evenings."

She only answered by a shrug of her shoulders. "My dear little cousin," he added in lowered tones, "when are you going to be nice and come for a row with me? The Tritons are looking for us."

"My great, big cousin," she replied, "you may tell them for me there are follies I am not guilty of twice."

CHAPTER V.

SILVÈRE SAUVAGIN was neither a bear nor a diplomat, in spite of his cousin Casimir Trayaz. Was he then simply odd? Yes, if by that you mean that he had ideas of his own as to the good and evil of life. Tell me what you value, and what you despise, and I will tell you what you are. It's our standard of values that constitutes our personality. Silvère had his, and it was not like everybody else's.

It must be allowed that his was a very positive disposition, that he was difficult to deal with. It was written in his face. Someone said of him when he was a child: "He's not good-looking, but one day he will have that kind of ugliness which pleases women." For years, this dark-skinned almost swarthy little fellow, with his angular features and hooked nose, and bright, restless eyes that made him look like an unfledged falcon tumbled out of his nest, had been so unattractive that his mother was the only woman who cared for him. He had been a very difficult child to manage; it was hard to decide which was necessary for him, gentleness or sternness. He did not care for caresses, and rebelled against them as if they were insults, but punishment made him furious. One day when he had been whipped, he ran away, and was found stowed away in a merchant ship bound for America. "The child has no heart," they said, but it was found that he had; he discovered it himself, and from that moment his features seemed to harmonise, and his face to grow softer. There were times even when his little black eyes, so eager and sparkling, would assume a caressing, loving expression which seemed to say, like the angels of the nativity: "Glory to God! goodwill to men!" But even in his better moments, he was like M. Trayaz, in that he mingled a kind of shyness with his charm. It was the only thing

in which they resembled each other. Ever since he had begun to lead this life of leisure, the uncle had sought in vain for something to love; but the nephew could hate as well as love. While still young he had developed one of those indomitable passions, as unerring as instinct in animals, which must be satisfied at all costs, or life is a failure. This passion had been his great blessing. Later on, circumstances in his life which he could never forget produced in him a violent and insurmountable antipathy for certain things and certain men, and these bitter feelings spoilt some of the pleasanter things of life for him. He could neither love nor hate by halves; an incapacity, more prone than anything else I know of, to complicate existence.

The great anxiety of his early years had been the defence of his master passion against his father, who held it ridiculous. Himself an architect, and son of an architect, M. Sauvagin meant his son to be an architect.

Mme. Sauvagin, who had married late, so that this son was the child of her old age, adored him, and would sometimes say to her husband: "Leave him alone, he has his own ideas about things." But so had his father, the gentle, obstinate man; and deemed his own best. His wish was that Silvère should go to school, as he had done, at Toulon, then finish at the university of Marseilles, and after taking his degree, enter on an apprenticeship in his father's office. The result of which was that Silvère soon grew to hate studies which were to lead him whither he had no wish to go, and for some years was but a poor scholar. He had decided that he had no gift for building houses, that the most interesting things in all the world are plants, and that one day he would be a great botanist.

He got this idea into his head by the time he was twelve, when his parents went to live in Toulon, where they had for next door neighbour a horticulturist, M. Sévérat, a most skilful man. One Thursday afternoon, as Silvère, instead of doing his lessons, was dreaming with his nose flattened against the window pane, he caught sight of him grafting some roses. His curiosity was roused, and as he was not

shy, he went down into the neighbouring garden, introduced himself, and asked M. Sévérat what he was doing. He was kind enough to explain, as he went on with his work. Silvère watched him get ready an eye, make an incision in the rose-tree, open it to slip in his bud, and then after closing it carefully, tie it up with a strand of knitting wool. He saw it all with deepest admiration; it seemed to him that a man who grafts roses is as sacred a personage as a priest officiating at the holy mysteries of the altar. He begged to be allowed to make a graft. M. Sévérat laughed at him, but handed him his grafting-knife. Next moment he stopped laughing in wonder at his skill, telling him: "It's in the blood." So thought Silvère too, and went home transformed. Henceforth the universe seemed to him a most interesting place, and with all his soul he envied its gardeners.

For the next two years, he spent all his leisure hours with his old friend, who employed him in many different ways, teaching him various things, how to rake, to water plants, to make cuttings and slips, and revealed to him certain methods he was proud of having invented.

One day Silvère announced to him that he thought the happiest of mortals is he who cultivates a garden.

"Ah, yes," he answered; "I am as happy as a man who has never been married to a mortal wife, but has taken the earth for his spouse."

And pointing to his ranunculus and anemone plants, he said: "Behold our daughters!"

Silvère thought, without daring to say so, that the Earth has many husbands, giving herself to whoever loves her, and he promised himself in secret that she should be his bride. It was at this time that his face began to soften in expression; his mother loved him for it, but his father, to whom his tutors had complained of his being frequently inattentive to his work, reproached him tenderly, he felt with justice; but still he had to be punished, though they did it most carefully, for fear he might again run away. He meant well and wished he could please his father; why could he not make him understand that he was no longer

free, but engaged? Earth and he had celebrated deep down in his heart a mysterious betrothal; these ceremonies are binding.

M. Sauvagin, who had several houses on hand to build at Hyères, where building was going on fast, went there to live. Silvère had to say good-bye to M. Sévérat. It was a great trial to him, but he found a certain amount of consolation in Hyères, which is one great factory of flowers and vegetables; its territory right down to the sea is an immense market-garden, and its suburbs are rich in flower-beds and horticultural establishments; and Silvère was always to be found in one of them. The grave, lovable boy inspired confidence, and he was allowed even into the hot-houses; he had for flowers all the respect, all the tender care a knight could have for his lady. He had heard it said that men are fond of women, and admire their beauty. His own opinion was that flowers are more lovely than women, that the most delicate complexion cannot compare with the tender softness of these silky and satiny tissues. As he was very sensible, he allowed that a little girl might be pretty, but to compare her to a rose-bud he held downright blasphemy.

To the cultivation of garden flowers he soon added that of the wild plants, to be found in such profusion of loveliness in the delicious country where his father was building. The minute he had an hour or two at his own disposal he would get away to wander alone on the Château hill, the Maurettes mountains, or the rising ground of Saint-Martin; from these expeditions he would bring back armfuls of plants, some rare and some common enough, and convey them to his room as secretly and with as many precautions as a smuggler getting contraband goods over the frontier. His adoration had changed character: it was no longer enough for him to admire, he wanted to understand. His love even induced him to perpetrate the crime of annexing a magnifying glass, which he shamelessly possessed himself of, to study the internal structure, the hidden secrets of his beloved creatures. He began next to want to know their history, their filiations and families, to be able to name and

classify them. He found on a shelf in the library an old book on botany, on the Linnæan method, which he carried off like the magnifying glass, and learnt by heart. After which he believed himself ready to reply to any questions that might arise for him, and in turn grew enthusiastic over truths as old as the world itself, but which he believed his own private discoveries; and over errors which seemed to him more fascinating even than the truth. It was all done in secret, he shrouded himself in gloom and mystery, and would have been as confused if his father had surprised him with his magnifying glass in his hand, as he might have been at being caught coming out of a place he had no right to be in. His deeds of darkness absorbed him body and soul; the rest of the world had no interest for him. He had been sent away from home to school: and his new masters complained just as much as the Toulon tutors of his inattention and idleness. His father lectured him, and his mother as usual interceded; but all that she said to excuse and defend him made him more angry than his father's admonitions. More than once, in one of these scenes of anger and tears, which occurred again and again, he was on the point of blurting out everything, making once for all a confession of the faith that was in him and of all his iniquities, as well as his scorn for the loathsome studies they imposed on him, and then fleeing to some desert island to escape the torment of having to blush for his devotion and hide its object. A chance meeting on the Maurettes mountains reconciled him suddenly and completely.

One fine spring day, he had gone up Mt. Fenouillet. He was coming down laden with specimens, when he perceived a middle-aged stranger sitting on the edge of a ditch, taking breath and mopping himself with his handkerchief. The stranger was a renowned botanist, a professor of the Museum, M. Martigne, member of the Académies des Sciences. He had come to spend his Easter recess at Hyères botanising. He called Silvère to him, examined his bundle, and found that it contained two orchids of a somewhat rare variety. From them he looked to the boy who had found them, and

was struck with his face. He loved all young things; not only the plants of the woods and mountains, but all that can grow and bud and flower in a soul seeking its true self, without having yet found it. The veteran made the young recruit talk to him, asked him what he thought of orchids, if he considered they were irises with irregular flowers, and put several difficult questions to him, which he answered at once, and others, much more simple, which puzzled him. M. Martigne, equally astonished by his insight and his ignorance, asked who taught him botany.

On his reply: "Ah! yes," he told him, "you are self taught; I might have guessed it. My boy, don't trust too much to your manual: books, like men, grow old."

Then he gave him a lesson, to which the boy listened with religious attention. A yard or two away was a nest of wasps, which buzzed now and then around them; neither the professor nor his pupil heeded them, or thought of being on the look-out for them; the wasps had settled that they were two inoffensive straightforward creatures, who were not likely to be disturbing, and left them alone. They went on their way together, found more flowers, and the result was a second lesson. The path became narrow and uneven. Silvère, who was walking in front, held carefully aside the long, straggling branches that crossed it, and the awkward stones that might have tripped up the wonderful man to whom he owed such valuable instruction.

He revered him as he might have done a god out of heaven, and in fact for him there was little difference between an Olympus dweller and this botanist who knew everything.

Once more they stopped to rest, and M. Martigne questioned him about his family; Silvère complained to the god of his father's fatal infatuation, in insisting that he should be taught so many useless and uninteresting things. The god told him with a severe air that he was talking foolishly, that there are some things every self-respecting man should know, that nothing is useless, that everything has its purpose.

"My young friend," he told him, "I have observed that

of all mental exercises the most useless and at the same time the most useful is the Latin exercise."

He was going away the next day. He promised Silvère before they parted to send him books, and made him give his word to attend to his lessons. Silvère asked as a great favour that he might be allowed to write now and then for help when he was in difficulty or doubt.

"I shall be very pleased," was his answer; "but I shall only write back if you are getting good marks."

When Silvère got home it was very late; his parents were beginning to get anxious; he said nothing to them of his providential meeting, which was a secret between his destiny and himself: love, the origin of every crime, had taught him to steal and now taught him to lie. He made up a long story which M. Sauvagin considered absurd, and his wife perfectly natural; but next day, and ever after, he became the most diligent of pupils, and his masters all praised him. It was not long before he begged his father to send him to the college at Marseilles, vowing he would do him credit there. At eighteen he was already bachelor of arts and of science, with an honours degree; and left Marseilles to go home to his parents for his holidays. The time had come to bring about an understanding with them, and tell them he was not of the stuff architects are made of. He foresaw new scenes of anger and tears, and dreaded the thought of it; but when he arrived at Hyères with proud carriage and sore heart, he found there awaiting him a misfortune which spared him the grief of a dispute with his father.

M. Sauvagin had prospered very fairly; he would have done better had he had more indulgence for the fancies of the good folk who employed him.

He was held to be a man of talent and scrupulous honesty, easy enough in money matters, but inflexible and quixotically delicate over anything in which his art was concerned, his art being for him as his honour.

So far he had only had private commissions; his great dream was to be employed in constructing with a free hand some public building where he could do himself justice.

For some time there had been an idea of building a theatre, to cater for the amusement of the strangers who winter in Hyères; but the plan fell through. This ancient little town, proud of its long past, felt that it would be derogatory to its dignity to consider itself as a simple winter settlement. The townsfolk of Hyères have an odd mixture of feelings about their winter-visitors: they recognise how much money it brings into the place, and how good it is for local trade; but they grudge these intruders the warmth of a sun that is not theirs by right of birth, though they lay claim to all its rays. The visitors are looked on as useful, but a nuisance; everyone would be sorry if they were not to come back any more, so they are graciously welcomed, but their departure is rejoiced over; the minute their backs are turned the place belongs to its real owners, who feel more at home, breathe more freely, and begin to organise at fresco dances again. In a word, the theatre was never built, and M. Sauvagin, who had been promised the job, lost this hoped for opportunity of showing at last what he could do.

A few months later, he thought the opportunity had really come. A big speculator in property and houses, M. Ravinot, came to him one morning to announce that a company, of which he was the director, intended to present a casino to a little town on the coast, more anxious than the municipality of Hyères to attract visitors and keep a hold on them; he added that M. Sauvagin was the only architect capable of making this casino a work of art; that he should have carte blanche, that his plans and estimates were accepted in advance. M. Ravinot had a persuasive eloquence, the gift of handling words and figures, of transmuting improbabilities into certainties, fancies into realities, pewter into silver; and an air of mystery, a way of discreetly alluding to his powerful friends, his connections in the higher regions of the financial and banking world. Whatever he said, you imagined, meant more than appeared on the surface; it was difficult to withstand the charm of his speech, which was both graceful and convincing. At the sound of his voice the hungry were fed, the paralytic felt they had

the use of their limbs, and the destitute saw showers of gold relieving their wretchedness. He promptly gained M. Sauvagin's confidence; if the honest architect was credulous enough to be soon convinced that his honour was at stake in the production of a monumental casino, his interest required he should become one of the biggest share-holders. Mme. Sauvagin, who had taken a dislike to Ravinot's face, hazarded some timid objections; she was told no one but a woman would judge of men and business matters by a face.

The necessary funds were not nearly raised by the time the work was begun on ground recently bought by M. Ravinot, and sold by him at a high price to the company. The building proceeded quickly, and they had already done much, when want of money made it necessary to stop. The great cajoler now changed his manner and his tone; his former eagerness was succeeded by an alarming coolness. When M. Sauvagin urged him to advance money he was sure of being able to recover, he replied drily he had already incurred much expense, and that he could not be expected to ruin himself for a lot of fools who understood their own interests so little that they refused to hazard their money in an enterprise intended to enrich them. M. Sauvagin began to think that sometimes women are right, and that it may even be allowable to judge of a man from his face; but to be wise after the event is of little use. The building was stopped, grass grew in the yards, the monumental casino afforded the melancholy sight of a new ruin.

The company had to meet its creditors, dissolve, and go into liquidation; the unfinished building was put up for sale, and bought for a nominal price by a Marseilles contractor; but it was soon known that the real purchaser was M. Ravinot, who had it finished, and furnished, and turned into a first class boarding-house.

M. Sauvagin had lost by his imprudence half his modest fortune; in obedience to his scruples he did not hesitate to sacrifice the rest. Many of his workmen had accepted the company's shares in payment; he held it his duty to indemnify them at his own expense. Nothing was spared

him, and every day his wife said: "If only you had been warned by me!" The catastrophe had happened during Silvère's examinations; on his return home he expected to find preparations for fêting his return and successes; he entered a house of mourning where he found two pale faces haggard and wan with trouble. The whole sad story was told him, and he in turn grew pale, but more with anger than sorrow. He was wretched at the thought of his father's ruin; what he hated most was the thought of M. Ravinot's insolent prosperity. From that day he conceived an intense hatred for the race of men of business and finance. His apprentice in botany ought to have reminded himself that in the same family there are plants for poison and plants for food, that the potato and henbane both belong to.

In his righteous anger he could not distinguish the innocent from the guilty, but held it proved that every man who grows rich is a rogue, who has filched his money from the pockets of others. When he climbed the Château hill, where he had so often botanised, it was not to look for flowers, or contemplate the sea and the lovely curves of the shore; but, seated on a low stone wall, to think of M. Ravinot, whose image was like an ulcer in his heart.

He was right in believing that this ingenious man's tricks of exploitation did him no harm in anyone's opinion; people said: "He is very sharp—a knowing fellow!" and when a big, fat coin dropped from his pockets, they ran to pick it up. The brigands in Greece, who have made a good round sum out of prisoners' ransoms, pay tithe of their booty, and sanctify it by building a chapel at Panagia. M. Ravinot redeemed his doubtful speculations by his liberality; leaving in all those towns on the coast which he had exploited some mark of his munificence, fountains or boulevards bearing his name. This very sharp man came to spend a few days at Hyères. As he was walking one morning in the Avenue des Palmiers, surrounded by admirers and parasites, a small, young man with olive skin and gleaming eyes planted himself in front of him, and accosted him without preamble.

"Have I the honour of speaking to M. Ravinot?"

"What do you want with him, my young friend?"

"I wanted to tell him he's a rogue."

M. Ravinot seemed more astonished than scandalised by the unexpected apostrophe.

"Where's the beggar come from?" he asked.

"It's young Sauvagin," someone told him.

"Yes, I'm young Sauvagin, and I'd rather be son of a dupe than a scoundrel."

M. Ravinot turned his back, and, followed by all his company, went majestically away, like a general escorted by his staff.

Silvère was so innocent he spent the rest of the day in looking for M. Ravinot's seconds to appear, and was astonished they did not arrive. Before long he learnt that the great speculator had gone away; he did not pursue him, but let him go his way, and cherished his hate, which began to grow dear to him. There was no more talk of his being an architect; his father had grown indifferent about everything, and left him to do with his future what he would. M. Sauvagin was one of those men who can do nothing, if things do not go well with them: adversity annihilates them. He lost his spirits; and his health visibly declined. By the end of winter an attack of imflammation of the lungs carried him off after a few days' illness; he went to a world where he hoped he would find no Ravinot.

A short time before his death, he had a long talk with his son, confiding to him the hopeless state of his affairs. Having lost three fourths of his wife's fortune he was anxious to assure to her the very small remnant that remained.

"You may set your mind at rest about that," replied Silvère; "I shall not cost her a penny; I shall make her buy an annuity, so that she may be as comfortable as possible. I promise you I will look after her."

It was more easily said than done; though he did everything he could to find some remunerative employment; and was not exacting, feeling a kind of proud joy in trampling on his pride. One day he discovered on the fourth sheet of a local paper this advertisement: "Wanted an

under-gardener, strong, honest, with experience: must have good references. Address Mme. la Comtesse de Rins."

"The very thing for me!" he thought.

La Comtesse de Rins was a Breton lady, whose health was delicate, but who had so much benefited by the winters she spent in Hyères, that she had ended by settling there. She had bought a fine house, with a big garden which her care had transformed, until it was the admiration of her friends. Widowed after ten months of marriage, she had worn half-mourning for nearly a quarter of a century, and had resolved to do so always. She was nearly fifty years of age, and it was evident she had been beautiful; but she was more imposing than attractive. She was dignified and cold, stout in figure, moving and speaking slowly, with a double chin, ivory complexion, and serious smile. She was less like a society lady than a lady high in some religious order. This abbess, who wanted nothing but the cross, was stout without being corpulent, and her embonpoint, of which she complained, served as a pretext for a stay-at-home life. Bodily rather heavy, but active with head and fingers, though indolent on her feet, she never went out except to go every morning to early mass, and spent the rest of her days in her garden. God and her flowers were her only passion, or perhaps it would be truer to say, the only tastes strong enough in her to accelerate the beatings of her heart.

Two hours after reading the advertisement that made him say: "That's the very thing for me!" Silvère presented himself to Mme. de Rins. He found her sitting in a tent preparing a most evil-smelling mixture that had been recommended to her as a sovereign antidote against fly-blight. She received the applicant with irreproachable politeness, but coldly, and as soon as she knew why he had come, exclaimed: "Surely you must be joking, Sir. You can not be speaking seriously!"

"I was never more serious in my life, Madame. My father was ruined when he died, and I do not want to be a burden on my mother."

"The son of an architect, of M. Sauvagin, a young man

of such promise, asks to enter my service as under-gardener?"

"Yes, Madame, and I will try to prove that a graduate can be of use."

"Shall I tell you my opinion? It is that you will be at the same time too good for the place and not good enough. For it's a work that has to be learnt; you can't be a gardener without experience."

"Ask me then to name all the plants and shrubs and trees in your garden—I can see over there a Dioclëa glycinoïdes, which is a native of New Granada, and a little further on a Bignonia Crucigera, which comes from the Antilles. This is a quince-tree from China, Cydonia Sinensis."

"You give them their scientific names; my head-gardener even doesn't know them."

"Plants," he answered, laughing, "come on better when you call them by their Latin names. It's a little compliment to which they are very sensitive."

"For me it is not enough to know plants: I demand that they should be respected and loved."

"It is not enough to say I love them; I adore them. And I must tell you, Madame, I have just seen a fine lemon-tree which is being allowed to be devoured by insects; it made me indignant—my heart quite ached for it."

"Don't you see I am occupied in preparing a mixture that will cure it?"

"Your mixture will only be a palliative. The only real remedy is petroleum."

"Ah! excuse me, the remedy is worse than the evil: petroleum withers plants."

"Because no one knows how it should be mixed with water. That's a secret, however, which a horticulturist of Toulon discovered and revealed to me. Oh, Madame, take me into your service and in two days your lemon-tree shall be cured."

This young man's frank, open face pleased her; but the brightness of his small, deep-set eyes made her uneasy.

"It is possible," she said at last, after an interval of silence,

"that you know how to get rid of those insects, but I desire that the men I employ should be obliging and willing and good-tempered, accepting quietly my orders and reprimands. Are you not rather hot-tempered? I have heard of a very unbecoming scene in the Avenue des Palmiers. Is it true or not that you called someone a rogue and a scoundrel?"

"Could you in conscience, Madame, dare to say that was a calumny?"

"Some things that I think, I don't say aloud."

"Agreed—my way is to say what I think. But I assure you I am very gentle with people I respect, and I need only look at you to know that I shall always respect you. I beg you to give me a trial, Madame."

She would not give in at once, but adjourned her reply. If she had had imagination, she might perhaps have suspected evil intentions on the part of this bachelor-of-arts who wished to enter her service; she might even have thought that, in spite of her forty-six years and her double chin, he was in love with her: it was unlikely, but not impossible. She imagined nothing: she thought it was a strange case, and that was all. The next day she sent to make inquiries, which seemed satisfactory to her. She decided Silvère was an original, and they were a kind of people she did not dislike. When one is no longer active, and never leaves home, it is delightful to have about the garden a young man who is a curiosity, an enigma. Two days after she sent for him, and told him she consented to take him on trial.

When his mother heard what work he had succeeded in procuring, she lamented loudly, and spent a whole evening in begging him to reconsider his decision.

"What a disgrace! What a come-down!" she said. "*Mon Dieu*, what will our relations say?"

"What do I care what they say!" he replied. "Have they been kind enough to help us in our distress? Were they even sufficiently polite to attend my father's funeral. They found excuses for staying away. Only my aunt

Limiès came, and she would have done better to have stayed in Marseilles. She seemed to think she was doing us a favour. I don't deny that she used to be kind to me; but that was when my father was somebody. Now she looks upon us as beggars, and went back home in a hurry, lest either of us should ask her for something. A Roman emperor said that all money has a good savour: heartless people believe that all misfortune has a savour of rottenness; they fear infection and prudently retire to a distance. . . . Ah, our relations! Let them think what they please! I am nothing to them, they are nothing to me."

The next day he entered his new employment; with rake or watering-pot in hand, he executed the orders of an old head-gardener, who was suspicious and jealous and watched every opportunity for finding fault. This disgrace, this come-down, which was the despair of his mother, was a source of gloomy delight to her son. I dare hardly confess in what puerile, foolish imaginations this *déclassé* indulged. In calling M. Ravinot a rogue, he felt he had smitten in this ugly cheek all humanity; it seemed to him that in reducing a graduate to the condition of a day-labourer he was making an attack on society in general, humiliating in his own person the vitiated blood of the middle class, which adores grandeur, and falls on its knees to successful scoundrels. This idea delighted him, and his eyes would fill with a dark light at such times.

Mme. de Rins's daughter, the Marquise de Bellesme, came to visit her mother. She was haughty, but inquisitive. This graduate excited her curiosity; she saw in his strange resolution a disappointment in love, for young women are disposed to explain by lovely causes all that happens in this sublunary world, doings of individuals, or revolutions of empires. She tried to make him talk, to extort his secret. She only got this reply from him: "I have turned gardener because I love plants." Piqued by her failure, she said to her mother:

"If I were you, I should get rid of this sly fellow. I

can't get at either his heart or his head, but I don't like his face; I think he looks a plotter."

"Well, I'm not married to him, you know," said Mme. de Rins, "and you may be sure that at his first prank, off he goes. But he does the work of three other men, and knows no end of things the other gardeners are ignorant of. He's not so bad as he looks. I get my secret information about things; and I know that he's very steady and well-behaved, never sets foot in a café, and spends his evenings with his mother, to whom, they say, he is most attentive."

Mme. de Rins's spies had reported truly: Silvère consecrated to his mother, with whom he lodged and took his meals, all his free hours, except his Sunday mornings, which he employed in hunting for flowers to enrich his collection, which, week by week, was growing more considerable. Mme. Sauvagin had henceforth a horror of the streets and squares of Heyères; fleeing questions, questioners, and looks which seemed to say: "There's the mother of a graduate who's gone into service." Silvère had found a little home for her about twenty minutes away from the town, on the Costebelle hill: a tiny workman's cottage, which they rented very cheaply. Moreover, he endeavoured to reconcile her with his disgrace by telling her he did not mean always to be an under-gardener, that this was his apprenticeship, that Jacob had served seven years for Rachel, and that the Rachel he meant to marry was a horticultural establishment; that one day he would be able to get credit to start one of his own. He added that the owner of the richest of these establishments had for a long time cultivated the garden of a private individual for a small salary. Sometimes she had faith in him, sometimes she had none, and adored him and reproached him by turns.

When the next year the Marquise de Bellesme came to spend some weeks with her mother, she was surprised at the change she found in this graduate. He had grown calm, at peace with himself and the world; he had no longer the air of a conspirator. Henceforth he cared less for humiliating the *bourgeoisie* in his person, than for succeeding in his

profession, which he loved, and he had become amiable because he was happy. Once more again, the world of plants had made him feel its wondrous influence.

Place near the sensitive plant, called Phycomyces nitens, a sheet of platinum you have exposed for some length of time to the sun, and you will see the flower reaching up to this stranger, which brings it news of its lover. If plants obey irresistible sympathies, there are also certain minds on which they themselves exercise an even more powerful attraction. This young man, who had read Vergil, and Lucretius, and had even done a little philosophy, loved his plants just as much as in his childhood, but in another way. The most insignificant interested and charmed him; he did not ask of them that they should be beautiful, it was enough for him that they were plants. These unconscious and mysterious creatures, who hold secret communion with air, and sky, and earth; whom nothing appears ever to disturb; these organisms that possess a soul, and yet are without passions, which are unacquainted with agitation, and in whom everything, death like existence, is accomplished quietly; these living souls which feel no need of change of place, or of utterance, in speech; this latent, confused sensibility, this dream life, this waking sleep, seemed to Silvère the most perfect expression of the divine, and in the moments during which he adored their immobility and silence, he felt astonishment that God should not have been content to manifest himself in the plant world, that he should have felt a need of something further. The plant fulfils its destiny; men and animals, which move and have voice, are forced to seek theirs. From that arise conflicting interests, ambitions, covetousness, crimes, frauds, men like Ravinot. The only remedy for our woes, he told himself, is a voluntary return to a vegetable existence, scorning the false goods which are the envy of fools and knaves, sparing of speech, caring only that he feels the life in his veins, and can listen to the thoughts of his brain; the wise man has his share in the peacefulness of the lilies, who love their own whiteness, in the blackness of the cypresses to whom their gloom is as dear.

At times, Silvère would interrupt his work to lean on his spade, and contemplate the magnificent garden into which he had shut in his life, and which, by right of enjoyment, was his own, and then it seemed to him that from this earth, watered with the sweat of his brow, emanated a mute blessing and a divine charm which he felt in all his veins. He was attaining the plant life, and Ravinot existed no more.

If his flowers brought him happiness, Mme. de Rins also gave him no cause for complaint. Although she was not exactly genial in her manners, still in her own way she showed him her esteem and good will by treating him as a young man who was above the place he had chosen to occupy. But, whether from disposition or from having lived long alone, she was suspicious, and fearing that he might take liberties, was a long time before she discovered that there was in him a fund of proud, timid shyness; and that, whatever advances she might make to him, he would always be on his guard. He loved plants, without any accurate knowledge concerning them: and she decided to learn botany. She spent hours in asking him questions, and, as she told her daughter, this graduate, who taught her also how to paint flowers in water-colour, seemed to her henceforth more interesting than alarming.

As the only son of a widow, he had but to serve one year in the army. She showed how highly she thought of him, how much she valued his lessons and his work, by telling him, on the day he had to join, that she would keep his place open; that, if he cared to come back, it would be ready for him on his return. He did care to, and she kept her word.

The head-gardener, Nicholas, more and more jealous of the favour she showed to one whom he alternately spoke of as a young muff, an oracle, and a toady, said one day to his other subordinates:

"I'll flatten down his young seedlings; he'll get into a rage, and I'll take care that Madame sees him, and we'll be rid of him."

Somehow, Mme. de Rins got wind of this little plot, and

in the interest of her garden and of her own peace (for she was at the same time both charitable and selfish), she set to work to baffle it. She detested fuss or annoyance of any kind, most of all a quarrel; and gave master Nicholas to understand that henceforth Silvère would not take orders from him; but that Nicholas must have in his hands the care of the greenhouses, seedling beds, and forcing houses, reserving for himself the management of everything else. He nearly lost his temper; but his pay was so good, he sacrificed his resentment to his wages. Later on, after an unusually severe winter, there was a good deal of damage done in the greenhouses, which, as is customary in the South, were only heated by the sun, and several valuable plants were killed by the frost. Nicholas took the opportunity to say before Mme. de Rins that he knew a young man who made out to be very wise, and talked Latin to his plants, but that that didn't prevent them from dying. She answered drily that Latin does not kill plants; that she knew a *comtesse* whom M. Sauvagin had asked to invest in a stove, and who had made the mistake of refusing to do so. She added that she did not like to see people jealous or discontented. The bumpkin at once gave warning, hoping it would not be accepted: but it was, and when he tried to patch up matters again, he was too late. The *comtesse* seldom altered a decision. Next day she made Silvère head-gardener, with three assistants to work under him, and raised his salary to four thousand francs.

When she learnt this piece of good fortune, Mme. Sauvagin, astonished at such rapid promotion, was persuaded at last that her son was not a fool. Henceforth she meekly accepted all the advice of this young man always so sure to be right. He induced her to remove to a better house and live more comfortably. The least profitable part of her property was the little house in the Toulon Faubourg, in which part of her "*dot*" had been invested, and for which she received a very small rent. Silvère succeeded in persuading her that it would be a good thing for him and for her if she would sell it. M. Sévérat was the purchaser, and

paid her a high rate of interest. He had not to do so for long. Mme. Sauvagin, whose health had remained wonderfully good, died after a short illness at the age of sixty-three, the climacteric year so fatal to the Trayaz family. She left very little for her son, but for the last twenty months she had enjoyed all the comforts of her former years. It was what he wanted: this proud, sensitive young man had sworn to be the son of his works, to owe nothing to anyone.

Mme. de Rins seemed to sympathise with him in his bereavement, and for the first time in their acquaintance, offered him her long white hand. She was slow in thought, as in movement; but her measured footsteps always brought her to the right place at last. After reflection, she realised what an important position Silvère held in her life, that she would find it difficult to do without him, and that if she meant to keep him long, she must attach him to her by kind treatment. At one end of the garden was a summerhouse of three rooms, generally used to accomodate certain old, worn-out priests, who came to Hyères for their health. Without telling anyone of her intentions she had it repaired, re-arranged, and re-decorated, and when everything was ready, begged Silvère to come and establish himself there with his plant collections. He tried to get out of this; his liberty was dear to him; but he feared to hurt her feelings by persisting in a refusal, and resigned himself to his good fortune. Little by little she got into the way of inviting him to déjeûner; one day she announced that henceforth there would always be a place for him at her table, and that she wanted him to live with her altogether. He made some objections at first, she insisted, and, the idea having some kind of attraction for him, at last he gave in.

So at this time they were living together. They spent their evenings in talking gardening, water-colours, and botany; sometimes too she talked to him of her private concerns, and confided in him. He by no means disliked the society of this grave woman, who wore none but sober head garments, and confined her hair in a net of black

lace. If she lacked charm, she had other more solid qualities, which he appreciated, and he showed his respect for her by attentions which cost his pride nothing. On her side, from day to day, she evinced a more marked taste for this young man. It seemed to her she had now in her life something that had hitherto been wanting, that they suited each other in every respect, that this little wheel worked in well with the big one. She was fifty-two, he was twenty-four, and they were by no means ill-assorted. They were united by the possession of similar taste, admirations, dislikes. *La Marquise de Bellesme* was alarmed by this growing intimacy. She told the marquis:

"You'll see, it will end in a marriage."

She was mistaken; in mind only were they married. There was one subject on which they did not agree, so they never alluded to it. Mme. de Rins would ask herself sometimes with uneasy questioning how she could feel so much sympathy for a young man who never attended church: was not this an unworthy weakness? did she not fail in her duty when she abstained from warning him, from catechising him? But this scruple did not worry her long. As we have said, she was as selfish as she was religious, and was sufficiently occupied with her own salvation to care less about that of others. However, one Palm Sunday, to ease her conscience, she thought it her duty to remind him to prepare himself for the Easter communion. She saw such a frown on his brow, she at once beat a retreat. "You are young," she hastened to assure him: "faith will come."

He would have liked to tell her that he had his own way of believing and communicating; that if he found human life a prey to frightful disorders which revolted him, he discovered in his plants divine sympathies in which was revealed to him the great harmony of the universe; that the garden he cultivated was his church, that there he met God and spoke with him.

Clouds come to every horizon. One evening, as visitors had come in after dinner, he took the opportunity to get away and devote himself in his summerhouse to micro-

scopical observations on a family of plants he had promised himself to thoroughly study. Before beginning work, he looked through the window for a moment at his beloved garden, that lay before him bathed in moonlight and was sending up a delicious scent of flowers into his room. He told himself that, taken all in all, his lot was a fortunate one; that sometimes, without knowing or wishing it, Ravinots bestow happiness. At that moment a servant in livery came to tell him the *comtesse* wanted him. "Ah, yes!" he thought, "but like the dog in the fable, my happiness wears a collar. And it chafes."

CHAPTER VI.

M. TRAYAZ had returned to France eighteen months after his sister's death. Silvère had learnt the great event with perfect indifference. He had quite withdrawn from his family, and had broken in his heart with all the Trayaz. Was there one of them who had cared for his mother's misfortunes?

"Whether he inhabits Europe or America," he told himself, "this nabob will never be anything to me!"

When he received his uncle's invitation he thought this nabob meant to hold full court, to surround himself with all his relations, even the obscurest, that they might contemplate his glory, worship at his sun. He refused his uncle's invitation, alleging as his excuse that his time was not at his own disposal. M. Trayaz liked to get his own way: he wrote to Mme. Rins herself and asked her to grant his nephew a fortnight's leave.

This letter upset the Comtesse very much. Now that long experience had taught her Silvère's worth, she had begun to fear he would be taken away from her; she was guarding her treasure against marauders, and M. Trayaz's insistence alarmed her. She was not one of those women of whom it may be said that their first thought is always

for others. On the contrary, in the important matters of her life, it was her own interest she always thought of first; but, as her religion was of the sincere kind that influences the feelings and the heart, she reproached herself for her selfishness, and out of the various lines of conduct between which she had to choose, decided after reflection upon that one which was most opposed to her natural inclinations and secret wishes. It was a mortification of the flesh, a kind of penance she thus inflicted on herself.

Silvère was with her when she received M. Trayaz's letter, which she handed over to him, and, as her way was, entering brusquely at once on the matter in hand, she asked him:

"Why did you refuse to go and pay your respects to your uncle?"

"Madame," he answered, "there are more interesting occupations in this world than taking a railway journey to go and worship ill-gotten millions."

"No one asks you to worship them; and, besides, what proof have you that M. Trayaz got his by ill means?"

"I know nothing at all about them; but I have the right to assume that these great fortunes which grow in a night, like mushrooms, are always acquired by dishonest means."

"And we come back to M. Ravinot," she said, fingering the lappets of her black lace head-dress, which were tied under her chin—the head-dress she never appeared without—and which was her nun's hood. "You have an unfortunate tendency to declamation. Believe an old woman, all general enunciations are a mistake, there are only particular cases, and as you are not acquainted with the one in question, abstain from judging till you are better informed. Poverty is no crime, but it is not yet demonstrated that every rich man is a rogue, and since your uncle wants to see you . . . ."

"Do you know why he wants to see me?" interrupted Silvère. "I'll swear he's not pleased with his head-gardener, and counts on me to replace him."

"If he makes such a proposal and offers you a good

salary, what will your answer be?" she asked, not without emotion.

"I shall say I am well off where I am, and mean to stay there."

Sensible as she was of the preference he thus gave her, she did not thank him; she never thanked. After a pause, which she used in examining her conscience again, she conceived it to be her duty to return to the charge, to insist.

"But indeed, Madame, why are you so anxious that I should go and do homage to the nabob?"

"It's in my own interests," she answered, "as much as in yours. If it were to happen to-morrow that your uncle should die, and that you were the only one of his relations to whom he left nothing, I should feel it to be my fault: I should reproach myself for not having urged you more insistently, and I do not like remorse; it keeps away sleep, and I don't care to be kept awake. Go to La Figuière, Monsieur; perhaps you will find there the devil is not as black as he's painted; when you return you will be cured of holding forth, and that will make you quite perfect. We shall both be gainers by that. . . . You worship flowers: remember they never declaim."

"It shall be done, Madame!" he replied; "for the flowers' sake and for your own, I will go to La Figuière to-morrow evening."

He telegraphed his reply; and twenty-four hours later started with much grumbling. At each station he was in a worse humour; the step he was taking humiliated him utterly. Who could believe it was disinterested?—"One has always a look of the business in hand," he thought; "I am sure that at this moment I look a mean creature, a fortune-hunter." And in revolt against himself, he wrinkled his brow, set up his back, promised himself he would be haughty, cross, fault-finding and disagreeable. His pride was bristling in advance, like a hedge-hog shooting out its prickles. It was in this pleasant frame of mind he arrived at La Figuière, without ever dreaming that M. Trayaz, to the great

amazement of his guests, had done him the mighty favour of ordering dinner an hour later on his account.

A servant, who was waiting for him, took his valise from his hands, and conducted him to the room that had been prepared for him on the second floor of the left wing of the building, that which his uncle occupied. In a few moments he went down to the *salon*, where everyone had assembled. When he caught sight of the little pale man coming to meet him, he said to himself: "This then is the enemy!" But the enemy looked at him kindly, patted him in friendly fashion on the shoulder, and after a moment's silent contemplation of his face, exclaimed:

"I am glad, my boy, that you are so like your mother."

There was nothing in that to object to. But the millionaire's long pointed nose, his livid complexion, and slow look, which weighed on you like lead, his loud way of breathing, as if there were not in the wide world enough air for his individual consumption, and then the familiarities he took, this hand on his shoulder, this "my boy" that Silvère had so little expected, all surprised him so disagreeably he recoiled a step backward. Under this good-natured welcome he scented veiled insolence. He looked round, and disliked the look of his relations, one and all, deciding that all these faces wore masks. Even the charms of Huguette he pronounced artificial and studied. At the same time, if he was not pleasantly impressed, he in his turn hardly made a better impression. He looked like a wolf caught in a trap, cursing his mistake and the hole he was in, and asking if there was no way of getting out.

"He looks rather mad," said Mme. Lejail softly to her sister.

"His eyes have claws in them," she answered.

At dinner he found his place was between Mme. de la Farlède and Huguette. This pretty young lady paid no attention to him at all, but set to work to show him he simply did not exist for her. Mme. de la Farlède, on the contrary, secretly examined him. She noticed that if the gardener's eyes had claws, he knew how to behave himself, was becom-

ingly dressed, and that his hands were very carefully kept. She was not the only one who studied him. He observed that everybody in turn fixed their eyes on him, and that he was watched with a curiosity indiscreet than well-wishing.

"What on earth are they staring at me like this for?" he asked himself. "Ah, I know they are all persuaded. I've come here to look after a share of the cake for more myself. What idiots!"

In the intervals of gazing at him, each person was watching out of the corner of his eye, their host's changes of expression, trying to find out from his face what he thought of the new-comer. Like all men, who in their youthful adventures have known hunger and privations, and for whom dinner was then sometimes a piece of good luck, M. Trayaz took big mouthfuls, and treating his meals as a serious business, ate in silence and seriously. It was not till the end of the second course that, having accomplished his duty and stopping to take breath, he again looked at Silvère; then he turned to Mme. Limiès, who was seated on his right, and said:

"Don't you think too, that this young man is the very image of his mother? At the risk of hurting your feelings, my dear, I will confess that of you all, sisters and brother, I loved Marian best. I do sincerely regret that I came back from America too late to find her alive, that I could not render her the last sad duties of all — attend her funeral."

"Oh, well," answered Mme. Limiès, looking askance at her nephew, "I don't suppose you would have been invited to the melancholy ceremony, any more than we were."

"What! my boy, you did not invite your relatives to your mother's funeral?"

"No, Uncle," he answered. "Before losing her, I lost my father, and that time I did invite them. Most of them found excuses for not troubling themselves; those who came let me feel how much trouble it was to do so."

This declaration provoked a general murmur round the table.

"Youth has lost its innocence," said M. Trayaz. "What, you unhappy boy, don't you believe in the family? I tell you, it is a splendid institution. I used not to think so, and when I built this house, swore to live alone like a bear; but I've thought better of it, and am glad I changed my mind. Sister, nephews, nieces, grand-nieces, everybody pets me, spoils me, coddles me. I am a cock in his hen-yard."

"And you are also," said Silvère, "a fortress invested by a regular siege."

"Then, oh trebly guilty unbeliever, you don't believe there's such a thing as disinterested affection in this world?"

"There is sometimes, but there's more of the counterfeit kind."

"How he maligns you, *mes enfants!*" the cock exclaimed looking round on his hens.

They were no longer murmuring under their breath, they were audibly indignant, and M. de la Farlède's big, round eyes nearly fell out of their sockets.

"Let each one speak for himself!" said Mme. Lejail, in her dryest tones. "We have not all such a heart."

"Take care, cousin," laughed Casimir, who never got out of temper; "it's a dangerous business to pick the locks of consciences."

"Let the orator proceed," said M. Trayaz. "This St. John Golden-Mouth amuses me. You agree then, my boy, that in coming here you had interested motives?"

"There are distinctions, Uncle. I have always thought there are three kinds of men. Those who have a comfortable income, soon learn how to enjoy what they have; but, by a fatal mistake, they persuade themselves that if they doubled their fortune, they would double their enjoyment; they don't suspect they will halve it. There are others, who have nothing, like your humble servant, and who have made up their minds to enjoy what they do not possess. Has it not been said that to perceive is to receive. I find as much pleasure in cultivating Mme. de Rins's garden for

her as if it belonged to me, and I often imagine it is my own."

"And she dosen't resent your appropriating her property in this way? I hear you and she are great friends."

"I know intimately," said M. de la Farlède, "one of the *comtesse's* nephews, Baron Viette; I shoot with him sometimes."

"I thought as much," said M. Trayaz, with a sneer. M. de la Farlède took no notice of the taunt, which he put down to Silvère's account, and, twirling his moustache, as his way was when he was going to launch an impertinence:

"Baron Viette assured me she was most good-natured; extremely kind and indulgent to the members of her household."

"What do you mean by members of her household?" asked Silvère.

"Ah, that's obvious! I mean that the *comtesse* is full of condescension for those who wait on her."

"You are right. I never wash her bottles without being thanked for it."

"You are getting away from the question," broke in M. Trayaz. "You said there were three sorts of men. Who are the third?"

"Those, my uncle, so superfluously endowed by fortune that they cannot use what they have; they don't know what to do with their portion, it's too big for them to swallow. When Sancho Panza was invited to Gamacho's wedding, he accosted one of the cooks, and with the politeness of a starving petitioner, begged to be allowed to dip a crust into one of his pots. Taking a saucepan, the cook plunged it into the big caldron and pulled it out—full.—'Take it, friend, break your fast with this froth till dinner is ready.'—'A thousand thanks,' replied Sancho, 'but what am I to do with all that?' He was at once happy and wretched. He thought it his duty to demolish the whole potful—three fowls and two ducks, and was overwhelmed with melancholy that his mother's son had only one mouth."

M. Trayaz became thoughtful: it was almost his own case. After a moment's silence:

"At this rate, my fine gardener, you pity me?"

"If I am not very much deceived," answered the audacious young man, "you are either the poorest of rich men, or the richest of the poor. But you have the advantage of being able to despise us."

"You are saying nothing, Huguette," cried her uncle, throwing her a macaroon she skilfully caught. "If you have heard his insolence, tell me what you think of it."

"I haven't the least idea what he's been saying," she answered crossly; "I only listen to people who interest me."

"The devil!" said he. "Everyone's out of sorts to-night, and we are getting absinthe into our milk. Young lady, come and sing me something, that will soothe us all."

And they rose to go out. As soon as Huguette had sung her song, which Silvère did not care to hear, M. Trayaz withdrew. He had already opened the door, when he turned sharply round, and taking his nephew by the collar, said:

"Do you know English?"

"I ought to know it. I passed in it at college."

"Well, then, I'll quote you a proverb—with one word changed. My boy, remember 'Sour heart never won fair lady.'"

Silvère, from whom the others drew apart, did not delay his good-night either. As soon as his back was turned, they rushed to Huguette, the only person in the family who knew English, to know what the proverb had meant.

"It means," she answered, "that a sour heart never wins a fair lady."

"The meaning of that's clear enough!" exclaimed M. de la Farlède rubbing his hands. "The fair lady is the succession, and M. Trayaz could not have told the brute more plainly: 'Vulgar fellows like you will never see the colour of my money; go and give someone else the benefit

of your impertinence.' Did I not predict that your Silvère would not be here twenty-four hours?"

"You are quite out of it, Hector," said M. Lejail sententiously. "M. Trayaz is such a peculiar man, it's quite impossible to know what he will do, and what he will not."

"The devil take you and your pessimism! I bet you anything you like by to-morrow our uncle will get rid of this gardener, who puts his foot into everything."

"He puts his foot into it for others, if you like," said Casimir. "I believe he's tremendously diplomatic, really."

While they thus discussed, this very politic person, alone with himself, was walking up and down his room, saying:

"It's I who am a fool, and I deserved the lesson I got. This evening I was pedantic and morose, a wrangler on guard before anyone thought of attacking me. M. Trayaz's proverb is right: The greatest enemies of our happiness are soured feelings. Be guided by them, and the result is you spoil your life, and lose your dignity. I never did anything that was good, except when I was feeling a little bit happy. I thought I would irritate my uncle by my insolence: he didn't do me the honour to get angry: he said to himself: 'I will be easy and good-natured, and show him how wrong he is.' When he gave me that reprimand, there was something quite fatherly in his tone and his look; his eyes were no longer dull, they were almost genial. Whatever sins he may have on his conscience, this nabob is not an ordinary man. . . . Well, since I must spend some days here, let's change tactics, have a little philosophy, try to be patient in misfortune, and if it's possible, cheerful though resigned."

M. Trayaz had two reasons for being indulgent to the defiant young man who had treated his millions so cavalierly, and who dubbed their possessor the richest of all the poor. He liked him because he resembled his sister Marian, the only one of his family who had believed in his future and his genius; as M. Lejail said, there are some things which cannot be forgotten. It might be added, that when the stomach is disordered by an abuse of sweets, the bitterness

of aloes or of colocynth is appreciated, and after being surrounded by compliant brows, and supple elbows, a young man who holds himself erect is a piquant novelty. Silvère's independence and his liberties of language had astonished M. Trayaz, but not offended him ; as Casimir said, he liked the change. It seemed to him that this young savage, whose eyes certainly did not *testify* coldness, had something of himself in his disposition, and he proposed to take a certain amount of trouble to tame him. All the same, he would not trust to first impressions, but resolved, before interesting himself seriously in this son of his sister Marian, to get to know him better, and feel his pulse a little.

The next morning he entered Silvère's room early and told him he had business to see to in Léoube, and would take him with him. An hour later, M. de la Farlède was quite overcome by hearing that the uncle and nephew had driven away tête-à-tête.

"I told you so, Hector!" said his brother-in-law.

"I said so first," put in Casimir.

When M. Trayaz, who drove himself, had got his pair of chestnuts into the pace he meant them to keep, he gave all his attention to his nephew, to making him talk, and questioned him categorically about everything that concerned him. Silvère at first only half liked it, and answered rather ungraciously. He was not naturally communicative; and in the beginning his answers were short and evasive. But his interlocutor was so intelligent and so interested, his questions were so clear and precise that, little by little, in spite of himself, his reserve melted away, and under the influence of some indefinable charm, he related in a breath the joys and sorrows of his childhood, his passion for flowers, his marriage with the soil, his meeting with M. Martigne, his studies at the college of Marseilles, his reasons for becoming a gardener, the hardships of his apprenticeship, his rapid advancement, the confidence Mme. de Rins had in him and the footing they were on together, this *comtesse* and he.

M. Trayaz listened most attentively, and did not lose a

single word of it all; without making any remark, he said to himself: "This boy has a will of his own, character and good sense; he has managed to find out there is nothing that is not worth doing well. He's no Casimir, I recognise my own blood this time."

Suddenly Silvère said:

"I have talked too much of myself, Uncle. Do tell me about yourself."

This summons, addressed to him in a tone of gracious familiarity, surprised him; but he was not offended by it.

"What do you want me to tell you about?"

"Tell me how a fortune is made in America."

"Will and endurance—that's the whole secret." Thereupon, he narrated in his turn various episodes of his adventurous youth, his privations, his sufferings, what life is like on a ranch or at the mines. His explanations were clear and distinct, sober and precise, and made a strong impression on Silvère. It seemed to him that since the day he had met M. Martigne on the Fenouillet hill, no one had taught him so much in so short a time and in so few words.

"Mme. de Rins is right," he murmured between his teeth.

"What has your *comtesse* been saying?"

"When I told her that I did not want to come here because I had a horror of all the capitalist race, she told me I was wrong, that the devil is often less black than he is thought—that there are in this world only particular cases."

"What, will you confess that you had a terrible aversion for me before even you knew me? and now you do know me . . . ."

"I pity and admire you."

"*Dieu!* how kind he is! Many thanks! I am inexpressibly flattered by your favourable opinion. . . . But, do you know, you are a very strange fellow? Do you generally tell people straight out what you think?"

"There's no harm, Uncle, in speaking openly to superior men: they have a natural liking for truth."

"Don't trust to that too much," he replied, with a quick

shake of the hand. "I know some who get pretty angry sometimes."

They had got to Léoube. M. Trayaz soon settled his little business, and they turned back; but talked less on their return journey. Each feared he had gone too far, had been carried away by an illusion. As they were going up a sandy hillside, the chestnuts began to move more slowly.

"You don't exert yourselves, *mes enfants*," cried M. Trayaz, "you want waking up."

He whipped them up sharply. They reared and were on the point of running away, but the hand that held the reins soon brought them to reason.

"From his way of treating animals," thought Silvère, "one can judge pretty well how he deals with men."

And he repented that he had delighted too much to listen to him. For the last quarter of an hour they hardly spoke three words. On their arrival they were met by M. de la Farlède, who believed he must be right in supposing that neither was in a particularly good temper. A few minutes later, he was saying to Casimir:

"You are like Lejail, my dear fellow, and create big black bogies to frighten yourself with. I don't believe they've got much pleasure out of their drive together. When they came in, your uncle was frowning, and the gardener looked like a man who has been made to swallow a glass of vinegar instead of a glass of wine."

But that evening there happened an event which would have greatly disturbed them, had they known of it. Silvère had gone up to his own room about nine o'clock, and discovered in a corner of it a cupboard full of old books, for which no place had been found in the principal library of the villa. At La Figuière all the books were old; the new owner of the place never bought any, and those which he possessed had come to him from Comte Destreux and his ancestors. Silvère took up by chance one of these old volumes, entitled "Ancient Moralists."

He turned it over, and came upon this thought of Marcus Aurelius: "He who in everything follows reason, knows

how to reconcile relaxation of the mind with necessary self-control, liveliness with sedateness. Have you your share of reason? Yes. Why then do you not use it?"

As he was meditating on this sentence, which seemed to him very à propos, there came a knock at his door, and his uncle entered. M. Sucquier was away overnight, sent to Paris on business. Deprived of his agent's conversation, which helped him to get rid of the evenings, M. Trayaz had come to the conclusion that there was only one person in the house who could replace him.

"What are you reading there?" he asked his nephew.

And taking the book from his hands, he made a face. It was not at all to his taste.

"Though you prefer the society of the dead to that of the living, and though I am neither an emperor nor given to moralising, come and keep your old uncle company. Our talk this morning has given me a taste for more."

He carried him off to his study and offered him a glass of whiskey, his favourite drink, which he got ready himself. He made him talk gardening till midnight, questioning him on the pruning of trees and on chemical manures. He found this was a young man who knew his profession, and could speak well of what he knew. These evening talks were repeated more than once, without anyone suspecting it. In the presence of the rest of the family, M. Trayaz was careful, and his conduct to the new arrival had in it nothing that could alarm them. He seemed to make no distinctions, keeping his attentions for his nieces.

All the while there was an odd conflict going on within him. At first he had only seen in his nephew a savage to tame; but his keen, alert intelligence, his free, frank character, his pride and his opennesses, the clearness of his look and of his voice had pleased him much, and he was fighting against their seduction. It had not often happened to him to love; what he now felt astonished him, and, despots being apt to look on the affections as a kind of servitude, he made stout resistance against this growing taste which seemed to him a weakness or a mistake. Silvère, too, was

struggling with the perplexities of a heart divided between its desire to love and an incurable distrust. He found it hard to believe that the aversion he had pledged himself to cherish against his uncle should have changed so easily into sympathy mingled with admiration. He said to himself: "Beware of going too fast, you don't know him yet." He was like a man going through a forest of a bad reputation: though he finds nothing alarming in it, he is on the look out all the way for a dangerous encounter, and is on the qui-vive all the time.

For the rest Silvère faithfully observed the law he had laid down for himself of being until the end of his stay good-natured to everyone. He had much way to make up, and his attempts at regaining the good graces of Mme. Lejail and her sister were quite fruitless. M. de la Farlède affected a patronising tone in speaking to him; M. Lejail was polite, and that was all. Casimir alone behaved cordially: this sensible man thought it absurd to keep at a distance from one's enemies, holding there is more to be gained by studying them than by repulsing them. As for the charming Huguette, from her cloudy heights this poor relation, who allowed himself to be insolent, seemed to her like some venomous insect.

One day he came across her in one of the walks in the park. She read, as we know; as she passed him she hummed to an air of her own invention the fabulist's verses:

> There was once a lover of gardening,
> He was half a rustic, half a cit,
> And he owned in a village somewhere,
> A pretty little garden and the fields round it.

He bowed very low and said: "*Ma cousine*, the old fellow wasn't thinking of me, for my garden is not mine."

CHAPTER VII.

M. TRAYAZ had had built for himself by the company of Associated Iron-Works and Dock-Yards of the Mediterranean a superb steam-yacht of heavy tonnage, which had cost him more than six hundred thousand francs, called the Albatross. He was inclined to get tired of anything that had been long in his possession, to weary of pleasures that custom had rendered insipid; but on the other hand he took great interest in things he did not yet possess, or which were still novelties. More than once he had been over to the Seyne, to assure himself that his boat would be all he desired. The Albatross had recently put out to sea, and as she had behaved well, was now anchored in the creek at La Figuière. He wanted to make trial of her at once. One morning, he announced to his friends and retainers with his most festive air, that he would take them that afternoon to visit his yacht, that they would make a point or two in the open, and finish the expedition by a dinner at Lavandon, which was celebrated for its *bouillabaisses.* Faces grew long and gloomy. Mme. Limiès and her daughters had little love for the sea; M. Lejail hated it, and considered it the most unhealthy of the four elements, an immense reservoir of nameless maladies, calculated to carry off their man in less than twenty-four hours. Besides, on this particular day, it was being ruffled by a not over-warm east wind. However, when they had got over their first disagreeable surprise, they all expressed an eager desire for an expedition in the Albatross, all except M. Lejail, who did not know how to dissemble, and the invitation was accepted with rapture.

There was a swell on, and the minutes which elapsed before the boat in which they put off reached the yacht seemed centuries to Mme. Limiès. Her pitiless brother seemed to have no suspicion of it, though. She wanted to hurry on board: he demanded first that she should admire, or pretend to admire, the nautical qualities of the Albatross, and her bewitching profile, her hull, painted white and decorated

with a band of gold, her slender masts, her tapering stern, the elegant cut-water of the bows. He explained scientifically how the keel had been shaped so as to combine with the utmost speed the greatest stability. At last his remarks came to an end, they were allowed to mount the ladder. A shrill whistle welcomed their arrival, the captain came to pay his respects, and the flag was hoisted, after which they had to make a tour of inspection with the owner. Everything had to be seen, and examined in detail; the steam propeller, the engines with double and treble action, on the upper deck the lookout box with its metal case; the kitchen and the apartments between decks; in the bows, a saloon with maple and elm fittings, windows draped with crimson velvet curtains; the dining-saloon with its teak panelling and big divans covered with red cloth, and fringed with twisted silk; the sleeping-rooms, dressing-rooms, bathrooms, pantry, smoking-room. While M. Trayaz was pointing out to the company that from stem to stern the Albatross was lit by electricity, while he was discoursing of turbinates, dynamos, ampères, and volts, his sister was proving to her dismay that in spite of its nautical qualities, the equilibrium of the Albatross was extremely unstable. Quicker in his resentment, M. Lejail, vainly endeavouring to avoid draughts, was silently cursing the dockyards where the miraculous yacht had been built, and the mischievous millionaire who was doing the honours.

They weighed anchor and started, and M. Trayaz decided that after rounding the Grotto pass, they would get out into the open, and come back by Titan Island.

The captain humbly represented to him that this could not be very enjoyable for his guests, as there was a choppy sea on, and the wind would catch the vessel and make her roll horribly. He was deaf to all remonstrances, for he had little sympathy for the sufferings of his neighbour, and in certain cases, was malicious enough to be very much amused by them. Yet Mme. Limiès was white-lipped and hollow-eyed, Mme. Lejail was ghastly, Mme. de la Farlède green. They struggled heroically, but had to give in. After the

necessary precautions, they took refuge in the dining-room, where they lay prone on the old divans. M. Lejail led the way. M. de la Farlède, who declared he was never ill, was a prey to vague feelings of discomfort; he no longer held his nose in the air; his words were short; and his cheerfulness sounded forced. He went to hide his shame by a porthole between decks.

The intrepid Huguette had a more solid stomach, and regular sea-legs. Jules, who was never ill, took it into his head that the deck of the Albatross was the best place in the world for a game of hide-and-seek, and proposed she should join him in one; she accepted. They were interrupted in their sport by Casimir, whose idea was that yachts are capital places for lovely tête-à-têtes. She chose to be gracious to this obstinate wooer, whom her harshness never discouraged, thinking she would mortify Silvère by showing him there existed young men to whom at least she was intermittently kind, and in favour of whom she would sometimes come out of the magic case that shut in the charms of her dazzling smile. M. Trayaz surprised her talking very animatedly with this cousin of hers whom she only discouraged on alternate days.

"You are no judge of men, my dear," he told her, "and you are bestowing your affections on an unworthy object. This great hare-brained fellow has nothing to recommend him but his guardsman's height, his silky moustache, and his eloquent tongue."

"To all these advantages, which are by no means to be despised," interrupted Casimir, "you must add, *ma cousine*, a heart capable of loving."

"In your place," went on M. Trayaz, pointing out to her Silvère, who was walking in their direction, "this is the young man who would inspire in me most confidence. And besides, you must take everything into consideration. We have just passed the Fourmigue reef, where in 1885 the steamboat *General Abatucci* went down with all hands. I am told my captain is a good sailor who has navigated in the States, and I hope we shall not be wrecked. Still it's

better to take precautions. Make friends with Silvère. I'll wager he swims like a fish."

"I can swim well enough," he answered, "but my fair cousin has such an aversion for me, that even at the bottom of the sea she would refuse my assistance."

"Bah!" said M. Trayaz, "little girls cling to life, and besides their friendships and hatreds are only make-believes."

"Sometimes," said Huguette, "not always."

At that moment the spray of two waves which met with a shock and a roar dashed over her, and as she darted away from the side, her foot caught in a rope, and she tripped and would have fallen if Silvère had not caught her in his arms.

"Happy mortal, how I envy you!" exclaimed Casimir.

"You see," said M. Trayaz, "the little actress did it on purpose."

She quickly recovered herself, and darted a disdainful glance at Silvère. He bowed his head and bent his knee.

"Believe me, Princess," he told her, "no one is less subject to illusions than I, nor could anyone better realise his nothingness."

By evening, having sufficiently proved his yacht, and tormented his nieces, M. Trayaz deigned to give the pilot orders to make for the land, and with canvas spread, they sailed towards Lavandon. As they got off he asked Mme. Lejail, whose drawn face showed what she had gone through, if she had enjoyed the expedition. She assured him she should always keep a pleasant recollection of it. Then he joked the corpulent Hector about his chicken heart, and sudden disappearance; to which M. de la Farlède replied with confidence that, far from having suffered any inconvenience, he had spent his time smoking on deck; that if no one had seen him, that was not his fault.

A few minutes later they were established in the Hôtel des Etrangers, where M. Trayaz, to the despair of the ex-préfet, ordered that dinner should be laid on the terrace, almost in the open air, under a rustic tent open on all sides,

attached at the four corners to wooden posts, round which clung the long tendrils of a wild vine. From there could be seen, on the left, a winding road, which followed all the curves of the mountain; in the foreground the village, the pier, and the blocks of stone which protect it against the sea; a great platform where the fishermen's nets were spread out to dry. Facing them was the sea; it had now grown calm and from being a very hard kind of blue, had paled by degrees as the east wind died away, and suddenly, as sometimes happens in these quarters, its opal tints had changed to dead white. Clouds reddened by the reflection of the setting sun were reflected here and there in it; one might have called it an immense bowl of milk, into which an invisible divinity had amused himself with scattering rose leaves.

M. Trayaz was in high spirits; he had satisfied himself that his boat, on which he was hoping before long to embark for America, where he would have to go to see after some business matter, behaved well at sea and went with the speed promised. The imposing *bouillabaisse* he had ordered the day before he pronounced delicious; and declared that what he got at home was not nearly as good. As soon as he had taken off the edge of his appetite he looked round at his family with the satisfied expression of a good shepherd counting over his flock. Then he said to Jules:

"Well, *mon ami*, what are you thinking of?"

Jules, who had done honour to the *bouillabaisse* and the sauterne, was by this time as puffy and fat as those cherubs in church pictures, which always look as if they were bursting with celestial glory. But his stomach's repletion had not interfered with the activity of his brain, and he was telling himself that yachts are a marvellous invention, that to possess one would be perfect happiness, and was indulging his mind in some beautiful dreams about them. He nodded his great head, which was feeling rather heavy, and thrusting up to his uncle his face like an old baby's, which at the age when life should be carrying us along, looked as though it were tired of existence already, said:

"Uncle Christopher, when I am grown up and you are dead . . . ."

He stopped short. A sign and a furious look from his mother cut short the rest of his sentence. M. Trayaz was not at all offended by the unlucky remark.

"Let him speak out, my dear," he said; "I have not reached my age without acquiring the certainty that I shall die one day . . . . Go on, my boy. You think, when I am dead . . . ."

"You'll leave me the Albatross."

"Eh, *mon ami*, I really can't say. Sometimes I get tired of my possessions, and perhaps I'll hand it over to you in my life-time. But tell me, what will you do with it?"

"I shall invite Huguette to come too, and we'll play hide-and-seek. But I shan't invite Casimir; he spoils everything."

"One for you, Casimir," said M. Trayaz. "Jules, my love, you are full of judgment, and as sensible as the little shepherd boy whose dream was that he might be a millionaire, so as to be able to do his shepherding on horseback. I tell you, I myself, when I was a little boy, took a tremendous dislike to a horrid old pair of knickerbockers my mother made me out of a green serge curtain, and hated them so much, I vowed I would make my fortune, in order not to have to wear green knickerbockers."

Then, looking round the table:

"It's by our wishes we learn to know each other. Tell me yours, *mes enfants*. If by chance to-morrow each one of you saw in his lap a million of money fallen from heaven or from my pocket, what would you do with it?"

These unexpected words produced a wonderful effect: up to this day M. Trayaz had never alluded to such a subject. It seemed as if they had all received an electric shock; suddenly faces brightened, eyes sparkled, forks were arrested midway. M. de la Farlède, who, having losses to repair, was eating like an ogre, dropped his, and with his nose in the air, looked like a carp opening its huge jaws to snap at a prey surpassing his wildest hopes.

"But, indeed," went on M. Trayaz, "what need have I to ask? For long I have read your thoughts. You, Martha, *ma sœur*, you are a good soul; you live by reflection only, your one care is to look after others, they come and eat out of your hand. You will use your million to make others happy and ungrateful. Will you yourself be happier for it? Perhaps: one is happy, if one imagines oneself so. As soon as she gets hers, Mélanie, your eldest daughter will pretty soon leave Le Dattier. This serious lady, with her black brows, loves show and the life of big towns. She will promise herself to keep up a big house, and show everyone that time is not wasted in the *préfectures*, that you may learn there how to behave, how to entertain, the science of manners, the difficult art of graduated politeness. . . . As to you, my dear Lejail, your tastes are more modest and you scorn vain appearances. A rare book, a packet of cigarettes, half-a-dozen overcoats and you are content. The wisest of us have some weakness; you have got it into your head there's a place somewhere where there are never any draughts, and you are miserable because you are not there: that's your delusion. Setting that aside you are a great philosopher, you know that millions can not heal the wounds of life, and that they have never cured a cold. You will hand yours on to Huguette: so that she'll have double allowance, and I vow she'll know what to do with them. She thinks happiness is a complicated matter, made up of innumerable expensive details . . . ."

"Ah, Uncle," she interrupted, "confess that details are very important."

"Why, yes, you are right, my child: it's the trifle that's the main thing in life, though for lovers it's not enough. Don't you see it's your turn, Casimir, spoiler of everything? What will you do with your fortune? You needn't tell me: you will use it, not to make everyone happy, but for certain friends of yours."

"There's only one I want to make happy," answered Casimir, with a furtive tender glance in Huguette's direction.

"My dear Hector," continued M. Trayaz, "you seem lost in a dream. You are thinking doubtless, you and your wife, of a certain château you have sometimes described to me. It's not a castle in the air, its ancient towers rear their crests not many miles from Grasse. It is a noble mansion, you tell me; my villa in comparison with this manor is but a cottage, a hovel. The man who is owner of it might count himself the equal of barons and marquises. Don't blush, Hector; we all have our weaknesses. And you, my sturdy Jules, rejoice, your future is assured, and henceforth you may be spared the learning of fables. A count's title shall be bought for you at Rome, you shall marry an heiress, and when you go for your honeymoon on the yacht that has not been left to you yet, you will not be playing hide-and-seek with the lady."

"Uncle Christopher," cried Jules, "when I have not got my donkey, I had rather play hide-and-seek than anything."

"Patience, my boy; you'll discover one day there are nicer games that you can learn, even if you are not a genius."

Though his talk was full of epigrams, he spoke with so paternal an air, in so kindly a tone, that it was difficult for his heirs presumptive to doubt that his intentions were truly as munificent as he said. Besides, to make them happy, he had only to resolve to do so. If he offered them ten millions to divide between them, would he have been poorer? He had so much. Yet, with the exception of M. de la Farlède, who held the thing as good as done, and had already in imagination stored away his harvest, there was a certain amount of distrust in their delight, and sometimes they believed, sometimes they did not. When faith prevailed over their doubts, they gave themselves up to pleasant reveries. Mme. Limiès forgot the Albatross and the terrors of sea-sickness. Mme. Lejail bade adieu to Le Dattier, Mme. de la Farlède was counting up the heiresses in the department of Var. Huguette was calculating that at an interest of four per cent on her two millions, she would

enjoy an income of eighty thousand francs, and that that is enough to satisfy every year eighty whims costing a thousand francs a piece. Casimir was looking lovingly at her, and saying to himself: "She will be mine before the autumn; I will be a kind prince, and give her all I have." M. Lejail, this man rich in experience, had kept his head, and doubted more than he believed. One thing only was evident to him, that he could feel a draught of air freezing his spine, and having decided that his turned up coat-collar was an insufficient protection, he tied a comforter round his neck.

As for Silvère he was firmly convinced that M. Trayaz was playing with them all, and was amusing himself by making fun of them. It was not a nice thing to do, and seemed to him such a piece of bad taste, that in spite of the vows he had made, he promised himself that if his turn should come, he would answer scoffs with jeers. His turn came.

"As to the silent young man at the end of the table," went on M. Trayaz, "he despises millions and pities their possessors. One only cares about being rich, if one has a vice to satisfy, and so far I have not found out that he has any. Ah, yes, though: he has an inordinate passion for plants—almost a mania. Add that he is a very stiff-necked individual, who would like to be his own master, and secretly yearns for a charcoal-burner's independence. However kindly disposed he may feel to the Comtesse de Rins, his happiness limps and his pack-saddle galls him. Supposing to-morrow a money-lender kindly puts at his disposal some hundred thousands of francs, he will soon get established at Hyères, a horticultural establishment conducted on his own lines, and when he has become his own master, his happiness will not limp any longer. Am I wrong, Sir?"

"But indeed, Uncle, have I ever said a word to you that could make you believe . . . ?"

"Why, what would you have? I am a bit of a magician."

He sent for some champagne, and raising his glass to a level with his eyes, said:

"My dear children, I drink to your happiness!"

Then with a sudden change of tone, he added:

"And thereupon they all woke up."

This word broke the charm, and everyone waking up, they discovered that during this deceptive conversation, night had begun to fall, that there was still a little twilight left, but that the weather had changed, and a storm was coming on. More than once already, M. Lejail had hinted that you can't be too careful when the wind is in the east; that on the coast it always brings bad weather; and that besides, to the great satisfaction of gardeners, and the great dissatisfaction of pedestrians, the last days of April are always rainy. Their minds were occupied with other things, and no one paid any heed to him; but he had been right all the same. The sea, which had lost its milky colour, was no longer distinguishable from the islands and mountains, but it made itself heard; in a hollow moaning, like an invalid lulled into a repose troubled by evil dreams. From the distance was advancing upon them a huge black cloud, with big fringed edges, torn and jagged in places, scattering round rags of cloudlets, sending across the still glowing sunset a confused mass of black smoke, continually furrowed by the livid flashes of zigzag lightnings.

It was a beautiful but terrifying sight. The wind had risen again, and was driving more and more of this smoke towards Lavandon; already too could be heard a distant rumbling of thunder. Mme. Limiès, though capable of every devotion, had one weakness: she was afraid of thunder. Her daughters and her grand-daughter too had begun to tremble for their frocks and hats. Deaf to all suggestions, M. Trayaz, who had lit a cigar, seemed plunged in a reverie they felt bound to respect. At last he enquired if the break was ready, broke up the sitting, and went off to the kitchen where he submitted the innkeeper to a long cross-questioning on his methods of preparing a *bouillabaisse*, thus proving that he still had some innocence left: for innkeepers

never tell anyone the principal ingredient of their receipts. After being assured that *rascasse* is an essential ingredient in fish soups, and that it is not always easy to get it, he gave the signal for departure. They crowded together into the break; and had hardly started when big raindrops began to fall, and soon the floodgates of Heaven were opened. The ladies had nothing to protect themselves from the deluge but their miserable parasols; they pretended to take it all in good part; for no one dared to complain. By whatever trials the god they worship elects to exercise their patience, heirs presumptive are as severe with themselves as any ascetic who aspires to the Kingdom of Heaven.

They arrived at La Figuière dripping, soaked to the skin, in a most pitiful state. As they got out of the carriage, M. de la Farlède shook himself like a dog getting out of the water.

"Bah!" said M. Trayaz to him sarcastically, "a few drops of rain never killed a man yet, and you won't make me believe, Blandine, that your hat is done for."

"We will enquire of it to-morrow, dear Uncle," she answered with an ineffable smile.

M. Lejail was convinced his last hour had come. He had hardly reached his own rooms, when, seizing his wife by the shoulders, and grasping them so that she cried out, he said in a choking voice:

"The man's not merely an unpardonable practical joker, he's a murderer! I can't make out, Madame, how this diabolical old man has managed to bewitch you; even if you do still believe in Huguette's two millions, and your own, for which I wouldn't give twopence."

He added that if he survived his drenching, before forty-eight hours were over he would be back at Le Dattier. She did not believe him. As birds can be caught with lime, so men are the prisoners of their hopes. However remote, however fragile, however unlikely to be realised they may be, we never rid ourselves of them. Over and over again we say: "To-morrow I will turn my back on to this cursed home for ever!" and lured on by vain hopes, enticed by the charms of a phantom god, we summon our patience and stay on.

CHAPTER VIII.

SILVÈRE had made up his mind to cut short his visit, and as he had no hopes to buoy him up, he was less likely to be inconsistent in his conduct than M. Lejail, and what he had decided upon he would put into execution.

He blamed himself for having been too easily persuaded to renounce his first prejudices, for having drawn in his claws, to give his paw to an ironical tyrant. He could not forgive M. Trayaz for having seen into the very recesses of his heart, and published his secret desires, for no other purpose than to amuse himself at his expense. For a whole day he treated him with distant coolness, and gave short, dry answers to his questions; the family observed with delight that something had come between them.

Next day, M. Trayaz received from Paris a letter which was not written by M. Sucquier, and which he read and reread with extreme interest: after déjeûner he said to his nephew, pinching his ear:

"Come up into my room, I want to talk to you."

Silvère followed him, resolved to make use of the opportunity to give a piece of his mind to this far-seeing old man, who used his magic powers of divination to mystify his guests.

After making him take a seat, the far-sighted old man said: "Let us have a smoke while we talk," and offered him a cigar, which he accepted very ungraciously. "Do you know, you're a confoundedly queer fellow? You're the very devil for touchiness, and have been sulking now for twenty-four hours? Tell me, what have I done to offend you? You said the other day that superior men love to hear the truth. Was it the truth I told the other evening when I allowed myself to say that, however happy you may be, your happiness has drawbacks, that there are times when your *comtesse* is a milestone round your neck, that you want to become your own master?"

"The goat must crop the grass where its cord is tied;

whether it pulls at its cord or not is its own affair, and in this case it does not like to hear its secrets published on the house-tops. The ambitions you reproach me for . . . ."

"I find them too humble, my boy; your plans are too modest; I have another idea to suggest to you, which seems to me a better one. . . . But your cigar is drawing badly; you've lit it badly. You do everything badly, if you're in a bad temper."

He lit a match, and handed it to him, then after a turn or two up and down the room, he planted himself in front of Silvère, with his hands on his hips:

"A horticultural establishment! how can you think of it? There are already eight or ten at Hyères, and besides you have never shown that you have business talents. Science is your strong point. Am I right? Yes or no?"

"If you mean to give yourself up entirely to science, you must be a man of leisure, and to be a man of leisure . . . ."

"You must have an uncle," broke in M. Trayaz. "So you have; why not make use of him? Be so kind as to hold your tongue and listen to me. I am not as mysterious as you are, and have not the least objection to anyone knowing what I am up to. All parvenus, when they are not idiots, feel sooner or later a desire to shed a little glory on their money. Some build hospitals with it. In my opinion that's an absurd way of using one's dollars. Hospitals and asylums only prolong the lives of weaklings unfit to live; those who build them help to degenerate the race. I said to myself: I made my fortune among the Yankees: I'll settle my obligations to them by presenting them with an observatory or a university. After all, though, the man who has made the fortune is a Provençal. Isn't it only fair that Provence should have the benefit of my generosity? You're a fellow it's suggestive to talk with; one day, when we were chatting together, an idea came into my head. I should like to establish a Botanical Garden at Hyères; but, you understand, it must be a model establishment, one that will be talked about everywhere, and that people will come from far and wide to see. Over yonder, there's a saying that

money can do everything. At the Muséum in Paris, if I am to believe the papers, there are courses in abeyance; their income is insufficient; ours, I assure you, shall be ample. Even if it cost me twenty, thirty, forty millions, I am good for that amount, and whatever the plants are, native, exotic, for food, manufacturing purposes, or medicine, they shall not lack manure. I can see them now in their well-kept beds, that shall be orderly to excess, intersected by trim paths, and bristling with little stakes supporting red and yellow labels. Gardens of naturalised plants, and seed plots, fruit-tree section, greenhouses and orangeries, library, collections, herbals, amphitheatre for conferences, laboratories for the chemistry and natural philosophy of plants, we will omit nothing; everything that could delight a botanist shall be there; it shall all be luxurious, abundant, magnificent; and those gentlemen who come to work in our laboratories shall be lodged in a building specially built for the purpose, which shall make them say: 'It's a dream!' But the Americans, who are practical folk, consider that in every undertaking some provision must be made for the uninitiated—the loungers—who after all are the greater part of mankind; it is the price we have to pay for a great success. We will have our labyrinth and our fountains, our pheasantry and our monkey house, our seagulls, marabouts, ruff-necked wild sheep, rhinoceroses and giraffes; loungers have a weakness for giraffes. We must not forget our hall for entertainments, our concert pavilion, and who knows? perhaps we shall make an agreement with the Toulon band. You see, I am giving you the details at once: as Huguette says, they have their value . . . . But you have let your cigar go out, you don't know how to smoke."

Silvère was listening to this surprising discourse with eyes fixed on his uncle; but so much had it dazzled him he saw nothing of him.

"A propos, what do you think of this young lady?"

"I don't think anything of her at all."

"You can't deny that she is very pretty. Oh, don't imagine I am going to insist on your marrying her. You

want to remain a bachelor, perhaps. Women are sometimes precious help-meets, sometimes also great hindrances. . . . But let's get back to the business in hand. You won't be offended if I tell you that before making any proposal to you I made careful enquiries. About everything concerning plants I am absolutely ignorant. I can tell an edible mushroom from the poisonous kind; beyond that I know as much as the good woman who nursed me. I have convinced myself in talking with you that you are exceptionally gifted, that you have the quick imagination and keen intelligence that make their mark. But what your knowledge is actually worth, there was only one man who could tell me. You had spoken to me of the great botanist, professor-manager at the Muséum, whom you met one day on Fenouillet, and with whom, it appears, you are keeping up active correspondence. I wrote to him, and have just received his answer, which I shall not show you, for fear of hurting your modesty. M. Martigne tells me you have undoubtedly immense talent; that you would be a naturalist with a great future before you if it were not that your present engagement prevents you from giving yourself up entirely to science; that you sent him recently a very remarkable monograph on some species or other, belonging to some family or other; that there are two sorts of botanists, those who can describe, and the physiologists; that you have as much talent for microscopic studies as for . . . . what does he call it? . . . . for the diagnosis of a new species. It might be objected that you are still only a youngster; but I have always thought that youth means hopefulness, and hopefulness is the first talent of all. In short, after receiving and thinking over this letter here, I decided to appoint you director of my Botanical Garden, and without including travelling expenses, and if necessary the expenses of official entertainments, to pay you from to-day a salary of twenty thousand francs. Will that do?"

Silvère was beyond replying, but his pallor answered for him. Happiness makes pale sometimes.

"Silence is consent. In three days you will return to

Hyères, say farewell to the *comtesse*, and start for Paris to consult your learned friend, who will reveal to you the mysteries of the *Jardin des Plantes;* after that you will go and study others in England, Scotland, and elsewhere. You will make observations, collect information, and take notes. During that time I shall run over to America; on my return you will have your estimates ready for me. One thing more, don't be frightened by big figures! I mean things to be on a big scale, and to make a sensation. Don't be anxious about anything. I shall make my will before long in a way that ought to satisfy you, and will see that your own future and the future of your garden is assured."

Silvère was overwhelmed; little specks were dancing before his eyes, there was a buzzing in his ears, and his brain reeled. He asked himself: "Is it really he who is speaking? Is this really myself listening to him?"

"I only ask one thing," added M. Trayaz: "we all have our little vanities, and I want to have inscribed on the gateway, that all who pass may know it, the name of the founder."

Silvère found his tongue and sprang toward his uncle, taking his two hands in his own.

"The inscription," he said, "shall be carved in letters of gold as big as myself. But indeed, I don't know how to tell you . . . ."

"Ah, you have changed your mind!" interrupted M. Trayaz; "I have succeeded in proving to you that millionaires have their good points, that they can be of some use. Bah! You needn't thank me too much; we always think of ourselves when we try to make others happy. You were wrong to despise me, you are right to pity me. It's not fame only I'm thinking of: before I had the honour of knowing you, I had already discovered that it is a hundred times more easy to make a fortune than to enjoy one, that there are portions one cannot swallow, and that the poorest of the poor is the man who does not know how to dispose of what he has. Our enterprise will give occupation and a flavour to my long days, it will be the salt of my morose existence, and, thanks to you, I shall not be bored any longer. My

boy, go and dream of it all, we will talk it all over again before you go. . . . You seem to me quite as much amazed as pleased. An American said to me one day: 'You are a Jack-in-the-box.' He was right. For good or for evil, I am a Jack-in-the-box. You have managed to please Jack, and I am certain we shall always be good friends."

To get back to his rooms, Silvère went past the library, which was reached from them by a winding staircase, and from M. Trayaz's study by a passage, lighted by a little round window. As he was going down this passage, he caught sight of a shining object on the ground, and picked it up. It was an enamelled gold brooch representing a lizard biting its tail. He had seen it before and knew whose it was; and at once remembered that though he had been hanging on his uncle's words, he had twice thought he heard the rustle of a silk gown behind the door.

Great and unexpected joys unnerve the heart like unexpected misfortunes; but it is a delicious unnerving. Silvère felt his happiness needed to breathe the open air. He went out, crossing the garden without meeting any one, skirted a hedge of pomegranate trees whose scarlet corollas were beginning to open, and made for the sea. It was the first Sunday in May. The country had all the tawny, golden tones the South takes on when the olive trees and cork trees are in blossom and the tamarisks are covered with their yellow spikes. Here and there the gleaming foliage of a fig tree, whose emerald green burst on the sight like a petard, contrasted vividly with these paler tints. The sky was cloudless blue; the weathercocks of the villa and the eaves of the farms sparkled in the sun; even the shadows were luminous; everything had a holiday air and a holiday flavour.

When he was within about a hundred yards of the beach, he sat down on a hillock at the foot of a tree. It was a familiar spot to him: since his arrival at La Figuière he had been there nearly every day. It was his customary refuge when he was tired of the insolence, the coldness, or the hostile demeanour of his relations; but that day it was not annoyance, it was joy he came to hide in this solitude, which

somehow looked strange and unfamiliar to him. The twisted roots of the pines, which were like serpents writhing in the sand; the pink and white rock roses, golden broom, and purple gladiolas; the elegant forms and melancholy paleness of the asphodels; the tufts of lavender in spiky bushes; the heath already past its first freshness; a sleepy streamlet, half dried up, over whose slumbers watched the tall rushes and yellow irises, all had for the happy youth the charm of things often seen, which when the magic of the heart has wrought its transformation on their face, seem new, marvellous, and rare. The tranquil sea was like a mirror. On the right of the gulf rose the white cliffs of Titan Island crowned with their forest verdure. To the left ran out the granite chain of the Maures mountains, whose soft, melting contours, undulating ridges, valleys, and promontories, were like magnificently arranged folds of drapery. The distances, bathed in a luminous vapour, were a dream of loveliness. Islands and mountains, plants and flowers, Silvère called upon them all to witness his joy, saying: "Do you know what has befallen me?"

Nightingales and blackbirds were singing themselves hoarse, turtle-doves were gently cooing. A cuckoo was filling the woods with its monotonous note, and was answered by the trills of a lark lost to sight in the sky. At intervals the land breeze would bring from Bormes the silvery tones of a swinging bell, and when birds and bell were silent, the only sound was the gentle lap, lapping of the waves, dying on the beach with a murmur sweet as a kiss. Waves, bells, blackbirds, nightingales, Silvère felt they were all in his secret.

Life looked a fairy tale to him. He was as astonished as Aladdin when, having rubbed the old wonder-working lamp, a genie started from the ground to say: "Ask what you will, I give it you." His case was more extraordinary still. A hard, disagreeable man, whom he had not liked even, had suddenly revealed himself to him as his good genius, had offered him what he had never dared hope for. What a position this would be for him! To hold up his

head, belong to himself, no longer be in the service of a kind, well-intentioned but selfish and exacting woman, who only half realized what he was worth to her; to know no other bondage but that of his tastes, which were manias; to give himself up to his demon; to have a Botanical Garden to create and then to govern; to possess henceforth immense resources, more than he required to extend his investigations and pursue the work which would make him a name —what a *coup de théâtre!* what a fortune! what a future! First he would scour Europe, talk with *savants*, see for himself things he had never dared to do more than dream of. . . . Yes, there was a good deal of the fairy-tale in it all.

"And yet," he thought, "if Madame de Rins had not lectured me, I should have stayed in my hole, should have missed my destiny. Poor woman! I ought not to speak ill of her!"

He reminded himself of certain high-flown diatribes he had pronounced not long ago, and reproached himself for them. What had become of his former wrathfulness, his ancient grudge against society? Mme. de Rins was right, flowers never declaim; they preach soothing for the heart's griefs, and those who cultivate them should heed their teaching. Was he not a living proof that these capitalists he had so often cursed are sometimes useful and beneficent beings? Doubtless it is a pity that some should have everything, others nothing; but if no one had a few millions to spare, where would be the individuals who start Botanical Gardens? Of course, Ravinots exist, and in expiation of their crimes, have never created anything but boulevards and fountains. The wise man should make up his mind to resign himself to certain disorders which are disappearing in the universal harmony.

A memory which all at once revisited his mind finally convinced him that it is a good old world. He was holding in his hand an anemone he had plucked on the way, and suddenly as he looked at its corolla transformed itself to his eyes into the face of a young girl. It was no fancy picture, no mere phantom of the imagination. The owner of

this lovely face lived and breathed, he had often met her in the streets of Hyères, and for some time had known that her name was Ameline.

"After what has happened," he thought, "what a good match I should be for her!"

At that same moment he heard footsteps on the sand behind him, and turned around to find himself face to face with Mlle. Huguette Lejail. He stood up, and prepared to leave her in possession of the place; but she left him no chance to do so. Going straight up to him, she cut off his retreat.

"I was looking for you, *mon cousin*, and came, because I was certain of finding you here."

She had been walking quickly, for she was panting and fanning herself with her handkerchief, and now she took off her big straw hat and left uncovered her beautiful fair hair. Then leaning against a pine-tree, and digging up the sand with her parasol, she went on:

"Yes, I was looking for you, *mon cousin*, to make my peace with you."

"We were at war then, Mademoiselle?"

"Don't be so ceremonious. Am I not your cousin?"

"Very well, *ma cousine*, I assure you, that whatever you may have done to annoy me, the lover of gardening, half rustic, half cockney, thinks no more of it."

She turned away her face as if to hide her confusion.

Then, looking sidelong at him, she went on:

"You see, after all, *mon cousin*, you do think of it. Yes, I have been rude and unkind, even the other day on the deck of the steam yacht . . . . Forgive a contrite and repentant girl. Her remorse has kept her awake now for two nights."

"Your conscience is too tender."

"But you yourself, *mon cousin*, have you nothing to reproach yourself with? You must allow that you were very disagreeable the night you got here. You had to sit by me; from the beginning of dinner to the end, you hardly looked at me."

"I am a bear, and can't be amiable unless I am encouraged."

She began to laugh, and told him:

"My father affirms that women claim among their rights that of being unjust, that it's the privilege they prize most. If you had been less disagreeable you would have guessed at the first moment that I sympathised very much with you."

"Really? You astonish me."

"It's true though. I knew your story—your troubles, your difficulties, the proud resolve you had made, and I don't think there's anything finer in the world than a young man who, in spite of his poverty, sets about cutting a path for himself through the briars and brambles of life. Courage is such a splendid thing! So is strength of will! You smile? Ah, what would you have? I am very romantic and love men of strong will—heroes, and in your way you are a hero, *mon cousin.*"

"Take care, you will make me conceited. To hear praise from such pretty lips . . . ."

She fixed eloquent eyes on him, for she believed in the magnetic power of her glance, of which Casimir said in rather commonplace language that "it had grip."

"You think I am pretty, *mon cousin?*"

"You would be very much astonished if I told you I did not."

She clapped her hands:

"Oh I am so glad I came! I see you have forgiven me, and that's a great weight off my mind. I was sure we should make friends, we should simply have to. It's not only that I feel a great admiration for your character, noble and generous as it is, but we have the same tastes. I have a passion for flowers, the passion of one who is ignorant, and adores without even knowing their names. When I was told you were coming to La Figuière, I flattered myself you would be so kind as to give me botany lessons. We have started badly, *mon cousin;* after a bad beginning it's better to start afresh; shall we begin all over again?"

"I should be very glad, but in three days I shall be gone, and however clever you may be, three days would not be long enough to teach you botany in."

"You can get a good many things into one day, *mon cousin.* I tell you what. Let's get up early to-morrow, you and I, and go and botanise on the mountain over there. It's full of pretty walks. Say yes."

"But what will they think? And what will Casimir say?"

"Ah, you are jealous!" she thought: "you're quite safe then after all."

And she answered at once:

"He does take possession of me, doesn't he? he's always at my heels, and bores me to death with his compliments. Between ourselves, he's very much in earnest; but it's not enough to love, you must be able to please. . . . Well, to-morrow morning at eight; that's settled."

She held out both hands, and had come so close, that as she spoke she seemed offering him her lips, and if he had loved her as much as he pleased her, he had then every opportunity to assure himself they were as soft as they were rosy. He fell back a step or two, and said in coldly ironical tones:

"How thoughtless I am! I was forgetting that a little while ago when I came away from a talk with my uncle, I found this pretty little trinket in the passage leading from his room to the library. It's yours, isn't it?"

He handed her the brooch; she took it, looked at him fixedly, and saw by his mocking expression he had understood, and guessed everything. Scarlet with anger, she turned her back on him sharply, and while he went back to the villa, she paced along the beach, telling the waves how she had been humiliated, defeated, insulted, and how aversions can be transformed into friendships, friendships into hatred.

Her custom was to remain silent through the conference in the Red Drawing Room, being content thus to profit by all that was said around her. But that evening, as soon as the

family were all assembled, she addressed them excitedly, announcing to these innocents, who had no idea how to set about finding out things for themselves, the memorable event of the day. She told them, that, having gone to fetch a book from the library, she had heard loud voices; this led her to think there was a quarrel on hand, and curiosity prevailed so far over her natural discretion, that she slipped out into the passage, and spite of herself, had listened to a long talk, which she reported word for word, her memory being as good as her hearing was acute. She did not care though to complete her report, by telling how she lost her brooch, and how it had been restored to her. But made up for the omission, by repeating three times the sinister phrase: "Even if it should cost me twenty, thirty, forty millions I am good for that sum."

Her tragic story plunged her audience into mournful stupefaction. Never had the Red Drawing Room seen such lengthy, melancholy faces, never had it heard such grievous complaints.

"Everything for him, nothing for us!" said one.

"It's like being robbed on the highway," said another.

"I always distrusted this poor relation!" said a third.

"Some surly folk know how to intrigue!" said Mme. Limiès.

Disappointed optimists take the gloomiest views of things, and when they are discouraged fall into despair at once. M. de la Farlède found his glass of cognac bitter, and banged it down so furiously on the table that it flew into splinters.

"Certainly," said he, "there's nothing to be got in this house but rebuffs, disappointments, discomfitures . . . ."

"And draughts," added M. Lejail in a cavernous voice, pulling his cap over his ears.

Huguette had gone off into the curtained recess of a window, and Casimir joined her there.

"Let's leave lamentations to these feeble hearts," he said. "What's the use of making a moan? There's something much better to do."

"What's that?"

"Set the tyrant and his favourite at loggerheads."

"That's all very well: in three days the hateful fellow will be gone, and how can they get at loggerheads when they don't see each other?"

"I mean that before then he'll have got into disgrace, and be sent about his business; that perhaps even by to-morrow he'll be going back humiliated."

"What plan have you got on hand?"

"Leave everything to me. You have been doing all you could to keep the enemy at a distance: it's a bad plan. I've been making friends with him, sounding him, watching him; now I know his weak place, and will get him through that. Only remember, please, that in working my small treachery, it's for your sake I do it. *Mon Dieu!* I'm a philosopher in my way—and my little income's enough for me. If I fight for my million, it's only that I may have the joy of laying it at your feet. Speak out, *ma cousine*, you really detest him?"

"I hate him."

"Well, if I succeed, what's to be my reward?"

"We will go for a sail," she answered with a tender pressure of his fingers.

CHAPTER IX.

When Casimir took this, in all probability, very rash vow, to ruin the favourite with the master, and destroy in the bud a fortune as brilliant as sudden, M. Sucquier had been back for some hours from Paris, and was again occupying his place at table. Silvère, who saw him for the first time, felt an instinctive repugnance for the oily, pimply face; but he had made up his mind never again to judge a man by his countenance. No one could be quicker than M. Sucquier in getting wind of things, or feeling how the land lay. He perceived at once that in his absence some-

thing had happened, that the new arrival had won the good graces of the tyrant, who treated him with a consideration and respect he showed to no other member of his family.

M. Sucquier calculated all his proceedings, every line of conduct he adopted; his principle and custom being to worship the rising sun. When dinner was over, he drew Silvère aside, began paying court to him, and loading him with compliments. He was interrupted by M. Trayaz, who said to him:

"You must know, Sucquier, that this young man is full of wisdom; instead of flattering him, try to get some of his recipes out of him, and ask him especially what ought to be done to cure a tree that's got chlorosis."

That afternoon he had gone for a walk with one of his nieces, and had been grieved to discover that the oldest and finest of his Scotch firs seemed to be attacked by disease, and had grown yellow in places. It was decided that next morning the agent and Silvère should go off together to visit the invalid.

Twenty minutes before the time agreed on, Silvère had gone down into the garden, and was smoking a cigar while he waited for his man, when he was accosted by Casimir, who was up somewhat earlier than usual, and who said to him after a few general remarks:

"What do you think, *mon cher cousin*, of that man who came back yesterday? I should be very much surprised to hear you like such a physiognomy."

Silvère had lately begun, with good cause, to wish the whole world well.

"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged," he replied. "You can't always judge by faces."

"I swear that in this case the outer and inner man agree perfectly. This fellow, whose redness is no maidenly blush, knows more professions than one, and is clever enough to be honest when honesty is the best policy. It's all very well for my uncle to have him for his agent. I've nothing to say about that, but to have him at his table, and allow him to dine with us, is really rather trespassing on the egregious

meekness of his dearly beloved relations and their acquiescence. I feel how mean I am, *mon cher cousin*, and blush for it sometimes. But what would you have? when we are the prey of feverish hopes we drink insults like water."

At this reflection Silvère made a wry face.

"This Sucquier is a scoundrel then?" he asked, ill-humouredly.

"We must do him justice enough to confess it's not altogether his own doing. His father was a first class chemist, formerly of Marseilles, and was prosecuted for adulterating his drugs. Condemned by the criminal court to two months' imprisonment as well as a fine, payment of costs, and notice in the papers, he appealed against the sentence, and lost his case again."

"Sons," said Silvère, "are not responsible for their father's infamy."

"You like strong words, cousin; we call it professional inaccuracy. What's bred in the bone . . . . you know the proverb; but Félix Sucquier, who does you and me the honour of dining with us, held his father's misfortune a warning from Heaven, and vowed to himself he would never have anything to do with the criminal courts. He came to Aix, where he opened an agency office, but he had few customers, and I could tell you no end of mean tricks he tried to get money."

By this time Silvère had begun to look on Casimir as the great enemy of his happiness, to regard him as some hairy caterpillar crawling all over his delight; but he could not doubt the truth of his information; M. Sucquier's face was enough corroboration.

"What helped, more than any of these transactions, to gain him respect and admiration," went on Casimir, "was that the kind-hearted creature was as merciful as a flint. If he had undertaken the management of an estate, or the recovery of a debt, he was inexorable, and found as much pleasure in turning out some poor beggar who couldn't pay his rent as I could in kissing a pretty girl. Every man according to his tastes! But, alas, great merits are often the

victims of misfortune. After one of his rounds, as he was crossing by moonlight a deserted square, two unknown assailants, jealous of his superior talents, fell upon him with their sticks, and left him in the road more dead than alive. This nocturnal encounter disgusted him with our good old Aix, and he removed his ingenuity to this part of the country, where he soon turned it to account in some feats I heard about one evening in a café at Lavandon. But I am letting my tongue run on, *mon cousin.* Promise me you will not repeat what I have been unwise enough to say, or at least don't mention your authority. I don't like offending the powers that be."

"Since you have begun, you may as well finish," replied Silvère, divided between annoyance that he had heard too much, and his desire to know what there was to be known.

"He used some of his ill-gotten money to buy a certain estate, and transferred it to a contractor who undertook to build on it . . . ."

Silvère interrupted him sharply here.

"You needn't go on," he said, "I can tell you the rest. The contractor grew short of funds; Sucquier made him advances and promises; when he again found he had not enough, he invented various pretexts for refusing him further credit, forced him to sell, bought the land and the unfinished house for a ridiculous price, finished the house, and sold the whole thing at a big profit. A year later, I'm certain, inconsolable at having been duped like a fool, the contractor died of shame and grief."

"I had not been informed of that last detail. You had heard the story, then?"

"I had no need to hear it. The rascal who ruined my father and caused his death was a greater personage than M. Sucquier, and his name was Ravinot; but their proceedings were precisely similar, and the two men are about on a par. Rogues on a bigger or smaller scale, it's all the same to me. . . Truly, Casimir, you would have done better to hold your tongue. I've been condemned to go for a walk with

the agent, and now, thanks to you, I know too much of him to find much pleasure in his company."

"You can't be too careful," answered Casimir. "Take my advice and leave your stick at home; you might be tempted to lay it across his shoulders . . . . But I perceive that amiable individual coming our way. Be a good boy, and as agreeable as you can. Remember the master here won't stand a word against his Sucquier. 'Make yourself small,' the Chinese say. Let's flatten ourselves out, *mon cousin.* When one's hopes are centred in the bounties of a tremendously rich uncle, voluntary self-abasement is the first duty of all."

Recommending prudence to a man boiling over with rage is the surest way of driving him into mischief, and in preaching self-abasement to Silvère Sauvagin, Casimir flattered himself he would incite him to some outburst.

But Silvère vowed to himself he would be guilty of nothing of the kind, that he would be careful and self-controlled, weighing every word. He reminded himself real wisdom resides in a proper medium between two extremes; that with care it may be possible to keep a rogue at a distance without offending him, to manage to be polite to him without degradation, to be courteous without being mean. Should he be courteous? It was asking a good deal of him. All that could decently be demanded of him was that he should be polite and civil, cover up his contempt and disguise it under an exterior of cold politeness, and he resolved to be strictly but frigidly polite. Even this cost him a good deal. Ravinot had risen before him again when he had believed the thought of him to be very far away; and was visible to his eyes, a phantom accompanying him the whole way, walking by his side, never leaving him. All his sleeping memories were suddenly awakened. His dormant antipathies began to ferment anew in his blood. The old leaven was at work through the whole of his composition.

Unfortunately the expedition he was condemned to make in this odious companionship was a regular journey. The invalid pine sheltered a chalet built on a spur of the

mountain, which commanded a fine view, and was a favourite destination for a walk. It was about two miles away.

"Going and coming," he thought to himself, "at the lowest reckoning we've got to spend two hours together. Why did that wretched Casimir poison my mind with his tales? Silvère, be polite, strictly polite."

He carefully avoided looking at M. Sucquier; but he could not help hearing him, and although this unctuous voice by no means resembled the curt tones of M. Ravinot, it seemed to him the man who was talking to him and questioning him was the man who had killed his father. To put an end as soon as possible to his torture, although it was a pretty steep ascent, he took huge strides. The agent, who was very short-winded, begged him to go more slowly. He did him that favour. At once obsequious and familiar, M. Sucquier congratulated him on the affection his uncle evidently felt for him, felicitated him warmly on being the only member of the family who had been able to do anything with this benevolent bear.

"I have never minded bears," he answered; "I only mind . . ."

He caught himself up in time; softened his epithet, veiled his meaning:

"I only mind people who are too clever."

He bit his tongue; but M. Sucquier had not understood; however intelligent he might be, there were certain natures which were an impenetrable mystery to him.

Silvère's replies being short and sometimes embarrassed, he concluded that the favourite was timid, and set to work to encourage him, to put him at his ease, and in his most affable tones offered him his services.

"M. Trayaz," he said, "has a pretty good opinion of me, and values my advice. If you ever have any rather delicate matter to manage with him, make use of me; I shall be delighted to be of assistance."

Saying which, he gently patted this restive colt on the shoulder, causing him to rear and start on one side.

"I thank you, Monsieur Sucquier; but I would rather deal with God direct than through his saints."

This reply seemed very rude to the agent, and mortified him immensely. He only worshipped a rising sun on the express condition it was grateful to him for his advances, and consented to come to terms with M. Sucquier. Besides that, the master had said nothing to him of his new and amazing plans; he had not yet heard to what a point of prodigious favour had risen this young man now scorning his services.

"Ah! you carry things with a high hand!" he thought, with an unpleasant look at him. "Sucquier has no love for that kind of jackanapes; he'll show you he knows how to pull down, as well as how to build up."

From that moment he became gloomy and silent. In vain Silvère, repenting when it was too late, made repeated efforts to revive the conversation; he only obtained the shortest replies, uttered in curt almost rude tones. In this toady's skin was a boor, very close to the surface. When they reached their destination, for the last twenty minutes not a word had passed between them.

They suspended their mute hostilities to look after the invalid, and examine together its state, of which they found M. Trayaz had much exaggerated the seriousness. So far the chlorosis had only attacked a lower branch; the rest seemed whole, and its summit flourishing. Silvère was as agile as a monkey. He stripped off his coat, and climbed up the tree. After a careful investigation, he convinced himself the root of the evil was a species of tiny fungus that only grows on pine-trees, and let himself down again to tell M. Sucquier it was impossible to save the branch attacked, which had better be cut off as soon as possible so that it might not infect its neighbours, and that they had better be rubbed with an unguent for which he gave him a prescription. M. Sucquier drew a note-book and pencil from his pocket, and was taking down the doctor's orders from his dictation, when he suddenly gave vent to an oath. He had just caught sight of an old man, about fifty yards

away from them, who, with a basket on his arm, was picking up fir-cones. He called out and told him in a rough voice that La Figuière was not parish property, that this kind of marauding was a crime, and that whoever does not respect another person's possessions deserves penal servitude.

"What a fuss to make about a few miserable sharp-pointed fir-cones!" broke in Silvère.

"Monsieur Sauvagin," retorted the agent sourly, "whether these fir-cones are sharp or blunt at the tip, I know my duty; I am here to execute the orders I receive, I believe, and in the execution of them I take no one's instructions."

Then turning again to the inoffensive marauder: "Be off with you as fast as you can! Clear out of this—you and your old filthy rags!"

The man, before beating a retreat, turned round to call out:

"We know of some very swell coats that have rogues inside them."

"Impudent fellow!" muttered M. Sucquier, and was starting after him with cane ready raised to strike, when Silvère got in his way.

"Ah, Monsieur Sucquier," he said, "what sharp ears you have! Is it really the first time you've been called a rogue?"

M. Sucquier's ruddy cheeks turned green; he foamed at the mouth. For a moment he shut his eyes like an owl meditating; then he opened them again, bowed low to his enemy, and began to descend the hill-side at full speed.

Silvère followed at a distance. He was not very comfortable. "What an infernal nuisance!" he thought. "Hang Casimir!"

His mind was full of an indefinable anxiety. Though the weather was as lovely, and the sky as blue as the day before, though the sea had kept its turquoise hues, and the woods were as full of birds and their singing, it seemed to him that the sunshine was less brilliant, that the skies were shrouded with crape, the waves were less blue, that the

nightingales and blackbirds had changed their note, and were calling out to him in English: "Sour heart never yet won fair lady."

As he thought over the unfortunate occurrence, the firm resolve he had made to be prudent and circumspect, and tread warily in these dangerous paths, the deplorable facility with which he had belied his wisdom, he told himself one can not do violence to one's nature, that our character is our real destiny, that those are happy who have none, but can yield to circumstances, so that they never jeopardise by an ebullition of bad temper any good fortune that comes their way. After which he tried to reassure himself, to prove he had no need to be alarmed, or grow tragic over this stupid business; that it would turn out all right, and that he would get over it somehow.

As he came up to the villa, he saw Sam, the valet his uncle had brought from America, advancing toward him. Our servants discuss us and pass sentence on us; the doings of the *salons* are soon the talk and entertainment of the folk below stairs. From the butler, and the head waiting-maid whose business it was to do Huguette's hair and Mme. de la Farlède's, down to the lowest of the scullery maids and grooms, M. Trayaz's many servants were following with keen interest the four-handed game that was being played at La Figuière. They calculated on the chances of each of his heirs, their degrees of favour, the vicissitudes of their variable fortunes, their ups and downs; they made bets on them like horses, and proportioned to the good luck they seemed to enjoy, the respect they accorded to each, and the eagerness with which they waited on them. For some days they had all been agreed in acknowledging that the new-comer had a long start—and would certainly be a good many lengths ahead at the finish, so Sam announced in a very reverential voice that M. Trayaz wanted to speak to him. In the state of mind he was in, Silvère would have preferred that Sam should have been less respectful in bringing him better news.

As soon as the officious American had ushered him with

infinite ceremony into the study where he was expected, he felt sure the prospect was pretty stormy, and had no need to look at his uncle twice to convince himself he was right. M. Trayaz's rages were not noisy; they were not explosive like bombs. Always master of himself, his deepest emotion was only manifested by the redness of his cheek-bones, an almost imperceptible quivering of his lips, and a quick way of speaking, accompanied by a slight stammer. He gave Silvère a queer look, and told him to sit down.

"What have you been up to?" he said. "What can have possessed you? Or is it your custom to go about interfering with matters that don't concern you at all? Let everybody look after his own affairs! My agent alone has the right to look after mine. What idiotic idea made you stand up for this old cone snatcher against him? If he asked me for fir-cones, I should give them to him; I have never refused them to anybody yet, but I don't allow my things to be carried off without my leave. I see what it is: you were seeking an opportunity to get up a quarrel with M. Sucquier, just that you might show him how much you disliked him. Your eyes say a great deal; yesterday evening, when I introduced him to you, I guessed at once you found his face repulsive. Do you imagine by any chance that yours or mine are agreeable to everybody?"

The penitent sinner, who so far had not uttered a word, opened his mouth to say:

"Do you know, Uncle, who M. Sucquier is, what was his record in Aix? have you ever got to know the story of that contractor . . . ?"

"I have had it all from himself," interrupted M. Trayaz. When he was much upset he could never sit still in one place. Now he began to pace up and down the room, and every time he passed by Silvère, tried in vain to catch his eyes, Silvère's head was down, and his eyes fixed on the floor.

"Do you think I am such a fool," he went on indignantly, "as to take a man into my service without making inquiries about his past and finding out all there is to be

known about his character and his morals? M. Sucquier is a clever manager, who serves me faithfully; that's the main point for me. If he has private affairs of his own that he will be called to account for by the *bon Dieu*, they must settle it between them. This speculation in property you reproach him for was perfectly lawful, perfectly honest. To buy as cheaply, and sell as dear, as he can, is what every business man does. Do you want to suppress commerce? Ah, well, business is business, and the law of life is that the weaker should be devoured by the strong. I see exactly what it is: the misfortune of this contractor reminds you too much of a certain architect and his ruin. Shall I tell you what I think? There is nothing to show me M. Ravinot is not a perfectly upright man, and you must forgive me for saying your father was a fool. He ought to have been more wary, more careful in looking after his own interests. Was it Ravinot's business to see after him? *Le bon Dieu* has ordered that the cunning shall always get the better of the stupid, and the highest degree of cunning, if you want to know, is to profit by other's embarrassments, the next to cause them. The so called honest men I have known were really only fools and failures; they would have given anything to cheat in the game, but hadn't the sense, it was less the intention that was wanting than the power to execute it. But that's just how it is, when one has lost the game, the best consolation is to invent principles and preach them, to indulge in virtuous indignation against the winner, denounce him to the universe and traduce him to public feeling. That's the way of the foolish. I have always felt suspicious of men with principles; I have never met a single one who was good for anything . . . You have many merits, my boy, and splendid strings to your bow. Unfortunately your brain is crammed with no end of metaphysical, romantic nonsense which, if you don't take care, will prevent you from ever making your way in the world. It's a disease that needs attention . . . *Mon Dieu!* I am ready to grant you there is such a thing as morality; but you must allow it varies according to place and time, character and profes-

sion. There are actions allowed in the mining districts of America which are forbidden in Europe. Even I myself have killed two men who were in my way: am I any the worse off for it, body or conscience? I don't care a fly speck for my two murders."

Silvère, full of gloomy presentiments, hardly heard half of what was said. The most melancholy thoughts were passing through his head, and now he envied the fate of such a one, who lived in cheerful mediocrity without ever a wish or an opportunity to rise above it, and so was safe from disappointments; now he followed the movements of a stray lady-bird which was journeying about on a groove of the parquet-flooring, and asked himself if she had ever before been witness of the foundering of a fortune.

His expression was so tragic M. Trayaz took pity on him. "There's forgiveness for sins," said he. "I don't demand the death of the sinner. My boy, we shall still be good friends, and your little escapade has made no change in my plans. But you will not be surprised that my forgiveness is conditional, and that I expect an apology."

"I apologise with all my heart," answered Silvère at once. "Whatever my private opinion of your agent may be, I have no right to express it to him; I have been rude to you in being rude to him. I am sincerely sorry, and promise it shall not happen again."

"Very good! but it's to the man himself you owe your reparation. It was not to me you said: 'Monsieur Sucquier, is it the first time you've heard yourself called a rogue?' I don't like delay, and to have things dragging on; so I told him not to go far away. He's waiting for you down in the garden; go and hunt him up at once. Shake hands, say two civil words of apology, and we'll forget all about the matter."

At these words Silvère was so dismayed everything swam before his eyes. He no longer saw either the lady-bird, or the table he was leaning against, or his uncle's flushed cheeks. All his ideas were in confusion, with one single exception: he understood clearly that there was a

rogue waiting for him in the garden, and that he had to go down to this garden, offer his hand to the rogue, and make an apology to him. He tried to collect himself, to master his feelings. For a few minutes he was deep in thought, examining himself, questioning himself, trying to find out what sacrifices he could demand of his pride that would not force it into insurrection, what violence he could do to his nature without mutilating his personality, without being untrue to his own self. It became clear and positive to him that the will has its laws as much as planets and plants; that if ever he should prefer anything to his own self-respect, he would have lost his soul, he would no longer be himself, but another man, a stranger, whose acquaintance he had no wish to make, that in fact he would no longer be really Silvère Sauvagin. Happening to raise his head, he caught sight of his face in a mirror, and found he was pale as death. Then turning to his uncle, who was looking fixedly at him, he said in tones of bitter mournfulness:

"I wish I could, but it's impossible."

M. Trayaz's first idea was that he had lost his senses: that any individual should dare openly to resist his omnipotent will, and say no when he said yes, was an accident that did not often happen to him, and was so extraordinary an event, that it always amazed him. But that a young man to whom he had taken a liking, whom he was ready to shower kindnesses upon, and of whom he only asked in return two civil words, should have the audacity to tell him they were impossible, was such an enormity that he could only explain it to himself as an attack of mental alienation. Knitting his thick, arched eyebrows, with gleaming eyes, and convulsively quivering hands, he took a wooden ruler off the table, snapped it in half, and showed Silvère the pieces. This meant: "As they can never be made one again, so is it all over between you and me."

For a moment he hoped the criminal would plead for mercy, and waited. Nothing being forthcoming, he said quietly, almost gently:

"I can leave you to find your own way out."

When Sam, whose carefully modulated respect was sensibly diminished already, had seen Silvère into the carriage, Jules came and sat down on the step to tell him with tears that his balloon had been blown on to a cactus, and was all torn to pieces by its thorns; the big baby was looking with despair at his collapsed treasure.

"We are a pair, we two!" thought the exile.

From the villa to the station at Bormes, and from that station to Hyères he felt as if he could hardly breathe. It seemed to him as though it was molten lead, not blood, that was flowing in his veins, that life was a heavy weight on his shoulders, that his burden was more than he could bear —more than his share.

"It's the effect produced," he told himself, "when the fête is over, and we leave the land of dreams, to find the beggar-woman just as she is."

CHAPTER X.

It was in no very pleasant frame of mind that the young man, to whom M. Trayaz had brought in turn the greatest happiness and the most cruel disappointment he had ever known, returned to Hyères. When things go amiss with us, we generally find some one on whom to lay the blame: Silvère laid the blame on Mme. de Rins.

"It was she who sent me," he told himself angrily. "Would to Heaven I had never set foot in the old vision-vendor's shop!"

He took up his work again and found it dull and uninteresting. He had to make a great effort to get back into his former groove; he felt he had fallen out with his old habits, perhaps too with his common sense. His garden seemed to him very small and his destiny very narrow. After a journey through space, here he was back again between four walls; and air and daylight were lacking.

Mme. de Rins, who had been in mortal fear of losing

him, was delighted to have got off with an alarm only, and fêted his return. She noticed the misery in his eyes, and questioned him. After a good deal of hesitation he told her his little story. However thankful she might be that his sensitive pride had so conspired with her own interest, she could not help remarking to herself that a penniless young man of the middle class has no right to sacrifice a brilliant future to a point of honour. He realised that she was listening to him with more gravity than approval, that she only half assented to what he said, and that his position seemed in her eyes less honourable than peculiar.

"What would you have, Madame?" he said with some impatience; "one may as well cease to be, as cease to be oneself; life's not worth living at that rate. My uncle has done me the kindness of showing me that our will is the most valuable of our possessions; what do I say? it's the only thing we really do possess."

"If it is so precious a possession," she answered critically, "it is perhaps wise to be sparing of it."

For a moment he was lost in thought. Then he said: "Madame, I want to be perfectly straightforward. If I refused to touch a rogue's hand, it was not because of my will at all; if I had willed to do so, my hand would not have obeyed me. One can get over a repulsion, an aversion, a loathing; one cannot get over a physical impossibility."

Unless he be an accomplished philosopher, the man whose peace of mind has been devastated by an unexpected blow does not attempt to regain it; once he has tried the life of the emotions, if only for a day, he begins to loathe the repose with which hitherto he had believed himself in love. That is precisely what happened to Silvère Sauvagin. His azure balloon having piteously burst in mid-air, his aroused unsatisfied imagination would not rest until it had inflated another for him.

One evening when he had gone into a book-shop, he found there a young lady he had happened to meet pretty often, and to think of oftener still. Her name was Mlle. Ameline Verlaque, and she was considered the prettiest girl

in Hyères. It was this Ameline whose memory he had evoked a few days before on the deserted beach in one of the most joyful hours of his life, and whose face had suddenly appeared to him, emerging from the corolla of an anemone he was holding in his hand. She was a good musician, and her voice was very beautiful; so she had come into the shop with her mother to buy the score of a new opera. When it came to paying, Mme. Verlaque, who liked bargaining, and who from disposition as well as necessity counted her pennies, made some objections about the price, asking for a deduction, which the shopkeeper refused. The daughter stood by during the discussion without taking part in it, beyond smiling from time to time at her mother and the shopkeeper, in a way which seemed to say that her mother's demands were just, but his refusals not less so. She was so good tempered, she always agreed with everybody. As Silvère was going away, she smiled at him too, and in this smile, which was exactly like the hundred others she smiled all day long, he fancied he noticed a tacit encouragement, a promise. In the state he was in, his inflammable feelings were soon on fire; he returned home, clanking his cane on the pavement, and telling himself that if ever he married the most beautiful girl in Hyères, his garden would no longer be small, nor his destiny narrow.

Mme. Verlaque was the widow of a doctor who had never had either skill, or the luck, which sometimes does as well, or any idea of managing. Persuaded that the surest way to become rich is to appear so, he thought he was doing wonders for himself, when he invested all his money in the purchase of a very historic and beautiful villa in the upper part of the town, above the old quarter, with a terrace in front of it offering a wide view right over the plain and the bay. To all the remonstrances of his family he answered that he knew what he was about, that it is the sign-board that brings customers to a shop. But the event proved he was wrong; his big venture profited him nothing. Rightly or wrongly the average mortal divides doctors into two classes: those who cure, and those who do not; Doctor

Verlaque made very few cures. One day, moreover, he committed a most unfortunate blunder: he took the beginning of a typhoid fever for pneumonia, and treated it wrongly. His homicidal stupidity was held a crime: in a little time he lost nearly all his patients; those who remained were just enough to make the two ends meet. The beauty of his house and the satisfaction he felt at having given his vanity so magnificent a setting consoled him for everything. But he did not enjoy even this imperfect happiness long; he died in his fiftieth year, leaving his widow in great straits.

This little round woman, whose kindly *embonpoint* concealed very sharp bones and many corners, and of whom it was said that never had there been any one so plump and at the same time so tough, had decision and a head on her shoulders. Without wasting her time in bemoaning the difficulties of her position, and the carelessness of the dead, she retired into modest lodgings in the Avenue des Iles d'Or, which she got for very little, and set to work to let the two stories of her villa, which visitors found charming, though they abused its difficulty of access. To get to it, they had to climb up narrow, steep little streets, paved with cobblestones, a very picturesque but absolutely break-neck approach, for no carriage can drive through them, in fact they remind one of certain back lanes in old Italian cities. Planted on the summit of a mountain, the Villa des Roses had few attractions for folks with delicate chests; and people complained too that the furniture was worn out and faded and wanted renewing. All the same, Mme. Verlaque bustled round so that she found tenants two years running; as time went on she had to lower her prices to get them to come, and there was a winter when one story remained unoccupied. That was a year of great scarcity in the little rooms of the Avenue des Iles d'Or. True Provençale as she was, she cared less for necessities than for luxuries; never minded the meagreness of her diet, and having to live on scraps of meat, eggs, onions, and olives; she thought it much more of a sacrifice to have to do without in her toilette. She would have liked to get rid of this unremunerative villa, which her

husband had bought for more than one hundred thousand francs; she would even not have minded selling it at a loss; but so many much more conveniently situated houses had lately been built in Hyères that no purchaser presented himself. She did not lose courage, though; for she never gave way, and always stuck to her plans.

With this wish to sell her house there had come another: she would have given anything to get her daughter married: an easy matter enough, you would have thought; Ameline was so marvellously lovely. As the name of the mountains along this part of the coast shows, the Moors for a long time dwelt in the country, and one may well believe there are still traces of Moorish blood in the veins of the inhabitants. Mlle. Ameline Verlaque might without fear invite comparison between herself and the most lovely Moorish beauty in Tunis. Rather short of stature, but of perfect proportions, she had delicate, regular features, an amber skin, eyes like black diamonds, whose perfect softness and sweetness made the beholder think of those luscious fruits that melt in the mouth, and abundant hair, so dark in hue, that, like a raven's wing, it revealed blue tints in the sunshine: it was what a painter called blue hair, and he said he had found it nowhere but in Hyères. Her mother's hope had been that some one wintering in Hyères, some count or marquis, meeting in the street this marvel made to inspire a passion, would not hesitate to offer her his hand and heart; but no one comes to Hyères to get married. As to the residents who might have asked for her hand, the very perfection of her beauty kept them at a distance. One is always inclined to believe that a very beautiful girl considers she has the right to be exacting, that a gem of such price and of the first water wants a setting worthy of her; and then too comes a vision of robbers to guard against.

In the present instance they were mistaken. This little girl had no luxurious tastes, she had not, like Mlle. Huguette Lejail, a complicated idea of happiness, and very inexpensive pleasures were sufficient to delight her. She liked her dresses to be well made, but did not care much what stuff

they were of, and had no fancy for trinkets. Why should she? If she put a pomegranate flower or a spray of jessamine in her blue hair, she was sure of making as much effect as an empress in her diadem. Besides, she was not in any way a coquette, and the eternal smile on her lips showed a simple, innocent nature quite devoid of criminal intentions on her neighbour.

She was truly an angelic creature, content with very little, and incapable of hurting anything. Sometimes, it is true, she would remember rather sadly that in times gone by her parents had lived in ease and comfort; that before he had lost all his patients, her father, who had worshipped her, used to load her with presents; that at twelve she had been sent to a very smart school in Marseilles, where she had spent a happy time, and whence she had brought back, with a confused recollection of many things, her modest demeanour, ladylike manners, and a remarkable talent for music and singing. The lean years had replaced the fat ones; she met them with a smile. She took things as they came, resented nothing, and was pleased with everything. She smiled on the little cares of life as she smiled on the passers by; she smiled over the very frugal repasts her mother was able to offer her, and the shabby upholstery of rooms which were very different from those of the Villa des Roses; she smiled over her poverty, she would have smiled on misfortune and perhaps even on death; she smiled at everyone and at everything.

There are good qualities which may be almost held defects. This perfect good-nature of hers, shown even in the softness of her glance, was the result of a disposition which in its easy unresistingness, submitted to its destiny as inevitably as the down from a dove's wing must fly hither and thither, floating and whirling wherever the wind carries it. She wished no one ill, but desired to live at peace with all the world. Still one could not help thinking, that, incapable of hating, she must also be equally so of loving. There was no deep feeling in this girl's imperturbable serenity; hers was a nature in which there were no depths. The

women of the South are, according to circumstances, either the most passionate or the most indifferent of women; when life itself is for them in their lovely climate perfect happiness, why should they go out of their way to seek any other? Indifference has its dangers. If some visitor or resident in Hyères had decided to marry Mlle. Verlaque, it was not against any outbreak of innate badness he would have had to guard her, but against her weakness, which was so easily led, against bad advisers, against the influence so soon gained over a heart which never felt any emotion without suggestion from outside. This soft wax took every impression, and whatever might be in question, the too indolent, too easily influenced girl was always of the opinion she had heard last expressed. Her mother took care to be always the last speaker, to guard her from all influences but her own. She dictated her child's opinions, her feelings, advised her, directed her, moulded her to her will. Though Ameline was not the least bit of a coquette, if her mother had ordered her to be so, she would have tried to satisfy her. But Mme. Verlaque, who knew what she was about, had decided that such a lovely creature had no need of resorting to little tricks of that kind; that without intention and unknown to themselves, the *ingénues* are more fascinating to men than any other kind of woman, and she purposely left her to her innocence, to the simplicity of her heart. A mother and daughter, who are both artificial, seldom get on well together; their calculations never agree, they are sure to use a different system of arithmetic. Mme. Verlaque and her daughter agreed wonderfully: the one undertook to supply the will, the other was delighted to consent to everything, and one mind only animated these two bodies.

Silvère's first recollection of her was of how she had looked when he caught sight of her on the day of her first communion. As he was going across the *place de la Rade*, he saw her walking to the church of Saint Louis, where she had that morning received the bread of heaven; she was decked as girls in Provence are decked on that day; on her head was a wreath of roses; her white frock was trimmed

with lace and guipure, and she wore a little satin pocket into which was tucked her dainty cambric handkerchief; in her hand she held a candle decorated with muslin, tinsel, and spangles, and from it hung a big bunch of orange flowers; this candle she looked at so reverently had cost twenty francs. The little girl, whom her mother in a dress of apricot pink seemed to glory in presenting to the world, impressed Silvère with her beauty; and not Silvère alone; everyone near crowded to look. What struck him most was her air of thoughtful serenity. He compared her to a little Saint Catherine who had just been married to the Child Jesus; he would have been wiser to compare her innocence to a blank page where life as yet had written nothing. There was nothing of religion in her thoughtfulness; the utmost that could be said of her was that on all occasions she conducted herself with irreproachable modesty. Still, if she was not meditating on the adorable mystery, neither did the curiosity she excited rouse her to self-consciousness. Stranger to all emotions, spiritual or profane, her face expressed a quiet satisfaction, and a secret happiness in existing. She did not yet know how this vast world which was opening to her eyes could be of use to her, but she found it very much to her taste.

Two years later, Silvère saw her again in the Avenue des Palmiers, which is the Hyères parade. Every Sunday after twelve, and one other day also in the week, you may see there the whole population, attired in its Sunday best. All the pretty girls are there; arm in arm they walk slowly and seriously up and down, passing and repassing, and darting glances everywhere. They come to see and to be seen, and while displaying themselves and showing themselves off, they watch each other, and pick each other to pieces. Every one has made the most she can of herself; the more fortunate are airing their new frocks; industrious as well as coquettish, their less favoured sisters have freshened up, adorned with ribbon or lace, a bodice often seen before but always willingly seen again. The girls of the *bourgeoisie* appear too, but they are less gorgeous in their at-

tire: which is their way of being conspicuous. During this march past, from the garden of a café near come the sounds of an open-air ball, the vague murmur of violins out of tune, and the harsh notes of a hoarse clarionet, while the promenaders pass up and down, disguising as best they can the melancholy of uncomfortable comparisons, the pretensions and anxieties of a never dormant vanity, under that air of nonchalance which is the charm of the South.

This procession is well worth seeing; even the most self-centred valetudinarians will not willingly miss the spectacle, and they grow younger at sight of it. It costs nothing, and is sometimes more entertaining than a box at the opera. Silvère never was to be seen there; but one day by chance he was passing that way at the right hour, hurrying along in his usual fashion, and rather impatient at having to make his way through the midst of so many skirts of all colours, when he noticed in the distance the little girl he had seen on her first communion day. She had grown up and grown taller. Dressed simply, and in perfect taste, adapting her steps to her mother's, she had kept her look of innocence but had learnt to smile, and this sweet, slow smile touched his heart. From that time he would sometimes walk down the Avenue des Palmiers on Sunday afternoon, and if he did not find there what he had come to seek, would sit down on a bench and wait. The story of Tristan and Yseult makes mention of a wonderful dog, the sound of whose bell is enough to bestow forgetfulness of all the ills of life; while he watched Mlle. Ameline Verlaque walking up and down, Silvère lost all memory of everything, even of M. Ravinot. Hardly had she disappeared from sight, when he found it all again just as it had been before, and lamented he had not lost himself longer in that delightful forgetfulness, which is true happiness. For some hours, a charming phantom face accompanied his thoughts, and when his eyes dwelt on his flower beds, he saw mingled with their blossoms visions of a pair of great dark eyes, and of hair that reflected the blue of the sky.

Here he had stopped, not caring to go further. He was

content to admire and dream, forming no serious plans, never thinking of possessing: in this case to possess meant to marry, and he had told himself a hundred times that life, as he had read it, was a fight; that one can only fight well if one is free from care and every kind of pledge; that it is enough to have the responsibility of oneself. He had not even sought an opportunity of speaking to this wonderful beauty, to whose charm he had succumbed; it was Mme. de Rins, who, without suspicion of harm, brought this about. She was the owner of the old house where Mme. Verlaque occupied certain back rooms, which were badly lighted and in need of repair. These repairs were continually asked for, and, like all house owners, Mme. de Rins turned a deaf ear. But Mme. Verlaque was not easily got rid of, and at last the countess gave way, and asked Silvère one day to go and see if there really was cause for complaint.

Mme. Verlaque received him very formally: she had been told he was an unsociable kind of man, hard to deal with in business matters. After renewing her complaints, she took him up to what she called her hovel; and at last led him through a dark passage to a room where some one was singing, and when she had thrown open the door he found himself face to face with Ameline, who hastened to leave her piano and bid him good-day. To the admiration he had always felt for her was now added a profound feeling of pity. At sight of this lovely creature in a gloomy room, exposed to the north, where no ray of sunshine ever penetrated, where the ceiling was all cracks, the wall paper dirty and in some places falling off in rags, where the bottoms of the doors, and even their upper panels were so greasy and filthy they should have been repainted long ago, he felt the same compassion he would have had for a rare and delicate flower, condemned to pine in an unhealthy cellar. In fact, one instinctly thought of a flower at sight of Ameline. She had a flower's beauty and charm, she had, too, a flower's silence; as a rule her smiles were "songs without words."

Mme. Verlaque was very keen sighted; she perceived

what the young man's feelings were, liked him for them, and thawed straight away. It seemed clear to her that this stern man of business was going to take up her cause, and as her imagination was very prompt in its working she had begun almost to fancy that some day the relations between them might even become more intimate still. She was confirmed in her conjecture when she found he endeavoured to prolong the interview, that he went on talking, and several times said the same thing twice over, and that though he seemed to be addressing himself to her, it was to Ameline that his eyes wandered.

On the strength of his eloquent report, the *comtesse* resolved to undertake the repairs demanded. He wanted to be sure they were being properly done, and this necessitated two more visits to the gloomy rooms, where he experienced emotions he had never known before. His visits were long; Mme. Verlaque, who, each time, was more amiable, made him talk and drew him out very cleverly. She knew (most essential point) that he had a rich uncle, a man of prodigious wealth, who was returning to Europe. She tried to get out of him on what terms he was with this interesting personage, when he told her he had never seen his uncle, and in all probability never would. This reply surprised her immensely, without troubling her; she told herself that if what she foresaw should come to pass, it was she who would undertake to coax and wheedle the nabob, and that she would demand a pretty big commission for doing so. She did not belong, like Mme. Limiès, to the race of disinterested mothers; what she sought, in her daughter's happiness, was her own. But, indeed, she was calculating rather prematurely. If Silvère looked much at Ameline, he never talked to her, and was strictly on his guard, as a man who knew that often we commit ourselves by one imprudent word, to what it is not always easy to withdraw from.

Yet, when the rooms were finished, and he was taking leave, he could not help saying to Mme. Verlaque, who was telling him how grateful she was to him:

"I am almost tempted, Madame, to regret that you are

pleased, for henceforth I shall have no reason for coming here again."

"But it seems to me," she said, "that you have a right now to our friendship, and that one can visit one's friends without a pretext."

He thought about it, but made no use of her permission.

When he met the ladies anywhere, he saluted politely and went by without stopping to speak. Mme. Verlaque concluded therefore that this strange young man liked beating up game, but would not take the birds, for fear of being caught himself; that if he *admired* her daughter, he was only *in love* with his liberty. The fact was, he had been making inquiries: what he had been told, taken in connection with what he had seen, had perplexed him. Some one told him: she is a case of still waters which run deep, and he knew that it is not safe to trust to those waters. But that was not what troubled him most: he asked himself if she were not in reality too beautiful for him. He would have liked to enthrone her in a palace, and surround her with all a queen has the right to expect. Certainly she was easy to please, and had simple tastes; she flourished gloriously in rooms where the sun never entered, whose decrepit chairs and ragged lounges had been unable to dim the brightness of her eyes. He did not doubt that she would be quite content with the humble, narrow happiness he could offer her; but he felt it would be torture to him to be unable to give her more. Then he asked himself if his love really was love. In all his studies, in all his investigations he was the most accurate observer; in the affairs of life, he reasoned on the *a priori* and somewhat abstract principles he had formulated for himself and from which he never deviated. He had decided that, like plants, great passions have always small beginnings; that true love is at first only quiet friendship, founded on mutual esteem and confidence, born of the natural sympathy of two natures; that one day this friendship warms into a hotter glow, until it sets the senses on fire, and there we have the passion of a lifetime.

"I think she is adorable," he said to himself, "and I pity

her because she has a lot so unworthy of her beauty. I should be mad to marry her, since I absolutely know nothing of her real nature. I'll think no more of her!"

And as a matter of fact he thought no more of her, and would never have taken another step if it had not been for his visit to La Figuière. He went there one man and came back another.

"I am absurd," he thought to himself all the same; "some one must have been casting spells over me. There on that confounded beach where I was indulging in such extravagant dreams, I vowed I would ask her hand. Then it was fairly reasonable: I had prosperity to offer; now that has vanished like a mirage, and my illusive happiness has only been a Barmecide feast. I'm in eternal disgrace with the great enchanter. For God's sake, don't get married: it would be madness."

He came across her again in the book-shop, and his madness seemed to him supreme wisdom. He said to himself no one but an idiot would content himself with seeing, that he meant to take possession at all costs, and would avenge himself upon his destiny for all it had inflicted on him by making Mlle. Ameline Verlaque his wife.

CHAPTER XI.

It happened that the very next morning he had to go to Toulon on business, and that on that very day, at that very hour, by that very same train, Mme. Verlaque was going there too, with her daughter, to be present at the marriage of one of her nieces. They all travelled together. Ameline was dressed for the occasion in a costume that suited her wonderfully. After minute examination, and the most abstruse calculations, Silvère came to the conclusion that it could not have cost very much, that the important thing is to have good taste, and then it is possible without ruining oneself to obtain a suitable frame even for a masterpiece.

This seemed to him a most consoling reflection. From start to arrival, they never got their compartment to themselves, so conversation turned on indifferent matters. From time to time Silvère sat silent, apparently wrapt in thought, or occupied, with his eyes on the window, in the contemplation of a rich valley, bordered by irregular mountains, whose fields, market-gardens, strawberry plots, vineyards and orchards are traversed here and there by the long lines of cypress or of thuyas which screen them from the mistral. Silvère looked at these thuyas as intently as if he had never seen them before, but I doubt whether at this time he really saw them at all.

Though his mind was made up, neither mother nor daughter could have any idea of it. But if chance had brought about their meeting in the morning, it was not by chance they met again in the evening. Before leaving Mme. Verlaque, Silvère had got to know by what train she meant to return, and when she arrived at the station, she found him pacing the platform. This time no one got into their compartment, and they could talk at their ease. Women who are coming away from a wedding can not speak of anything else. Mme. Verlaque expatiated on the ceremony, the breakfast which had followed, even grew cynical in her account of it all, made fun of the young couple, and accused her niece of one or two blunders.

"Don't think I'm ill-natured," she added. "When people are being married they've no right to complain if they are picked to pieces: it's the common lot, no one can escape it."

"Oh, Madame," he answered quickly, "some day there will be a bride in whom nobody, I swear, will be able to pick holes."

There are times and places one can never forget. They had just passed the station at La Garde, a village nestled at the foot of a rock which is crowned by the ruins of an old castle. Beyond rises Le Condon, a mountain, not in reality of great height, but which seems to be so from its position, its air of size, and the boldness of its steep declivity. On its right was the smiling valley of Gapeau. In spite of the rum-

bling of the train, it seemed to Silvère Sauvagin that all the world was silent to better hear what he was about to say. Like a man who collects himself before leaping a ditch, he communed with himself for a moment. Then taking off his hat, and leaning over to Mme. Verlaque, he said in a voice choked with emotion:

"Madame, could you consent to give her to me?"

She grew quite red with astonishment and delight. She had heard not long before that he had been spending a fortnight with the nabob, and as her information went no further, she had been dreaming all kinds of things.

"At last!" she said to herself.

Then, looking him full in the face:

"Monsieur, what do you mean?"

"I like a happiness that is bold, and am bold enough to believe myself not unworthy of the hand of Mlle. Ameline Verlaque."

"What! Without preparation, without preface, you announce such a piece of news in this blunt way?"

"Have you not done me the honour of telling me you would look on me as a friend?"

"*Bon Dieu!* friend or not, was a mother ever asked for her daughter's hand in the compartment of a railway train? Your methods are so strange, so unusual! . . . . You are really in love with her?"

"There are things I find it hard to say; what I can tell you is that before seeing your daughter, I had solemnly vowed never to marry. I have altered my mind, and you may be sure I have not done so lightly. Ah! I beg you . . . ."

"Give me time to breathe. You can't seize people by the throat in this way."

"Madame, I have been sometimes praised and sometimes blamed for being always very much in earnest about anything I want."

"That may be so. Well, since you are so urgent, we will consult the person concerned: her decision shall be mine. Ameline, you have heard? What do you say?"

If Ameline was much moved, her face did not show it; she looked for a moment at her mother, begging her with her eyes to tell her what to say. Then in a very low voice:

"Ah, monsieur, I am so astonished . . . ."

"My child," interrupted Mme. Verlaque, "M. Sauvagin is one of those very quick men who do not like to lose time, and do everything offhand: you must adopt his pace . . . . Do you say yes or no?"

Again Ameline looked into the eyes where she was accustomed to find her will.

"It seems to me," she said, looking down, "I really think . . . . Yes, it seems to me that I really don't think I have any reason for not saying yes."

He asked no more, and taking her right hand in his, lifted it to his lips.

"Certainly," said Mme. Verlaque, "things are done today with a rapidity that overwhelms me. Could I ever imagine this morning I should bring back a son-in-law from Toulon? But," she went on resolutely, "I make my conditions: this marriage cannot be for another ten months."

He cried out at this, protested, rebelled.

"Ten months are not a century," she replied. "And it's a point on which I shall not yield. My husband was very anxious that his daughter should not be married too young, and on his death-bed made me promise to wait till she was sixteen. She will be sixteen in ten months: I promised, and shall keep my word."

It is not impossible that this promise given to a dying man was only a pretext, an evasion. Mme. Verlaque was as quick at devising such as she was expert; and had always a loop-hole ready, for she never gave her real reasons. What she prized in Silvère Sauvagin was not the man, but the nephew, and even the nephew interested her much less than the uncle, with whom she promised herself she would lose no time in making acquaintance. At this moment her head was full of M. Christophe Trayaz, and her

designs on him. She considered he would be the stingiest of old men, and herself the stupidest of women, if she did not induce him to give her daughter a magnificent *dot*. She could trust no one but herself to bring this about, and however clever one may be, such affairs take time. She had another reason, equally important, for demanding this delay. Silvère had owned himself very much in earnest always about what he wanted; she had suspected as much; for a long time now she had looked upon him as a very obstinate, unyielding character. He would have to be educated; were ten months too long for taking him in hand and breaking him in? She expected much from her future son-in-law; being one of those mothers who intend to keep their daughters when they give them up to a husband, she had always carefully instilled into hers that the very day after the wedding she would expect to be installed in her house, that she would manage everything, things, beasts, and men, the whole household. She would have to begin at once to gradually prepare her son-in-law for this voluntary servitude, supple his spine and his temper. For ten months with her daughter still at her disposal, she would have this lover in her power. She proposed to reward him according to his works, to measure favours by submissions, portion out with strict exactness punishment and recompense, and render his divinity more or less easy of access according to circumstances, while the divinity herself would be instructed sometimes to reduce him by a treatment of coolness. Can a sinner expect to get to Heaven, unless he serves his time in Purgatory? and when the kid is too tough is it not the duty of a good cook to make it tender by pickling and soaking in vinegar?

Silvère was not long in seeing his resistance was useless, but soon consoled himself. Gazing with an air of ownership at Ameline, he took possession in advance of his Promised Land.

Was he deceiving himself? It seemed to him the black diamonds had never before gleamed so tenderly; that she was smiling as she had never smiled hitherto, that this smile

was unique, a perfectly new flower he had called into existence and of which he had the right to be proud. When they arrived at their journey's end, and had to say good-bye, he was overjoyed with his new possession.

"Any way," he said to himself, as he walked back to the town, "if she does not love me as I love her, she loves me at all events as much as she can love."

What annoyed him was that he would have to tell Mme. de Rins all about it. He knew there are some things it is difficult to explain; he knew also that of all the things in this world that the *comtesse* could not understand, sudden, impulsive action was what was most incomprehensible to her. But it was not in his nature to put off doing anything disagreeable; and he decided he would make his confession before the evening was out.

At ten o'clock, when the *comtesse*, who retired early, rose to say good-night, he asked her to sit down again.

"Grant me a few moments' conversation," he said; "I have a secret to tell you."

His looks and tone were so serious she grew alarmed. Her nature was to expect the worst: had he made it up with his uncle?

"I have got a strange idea into my head," he said. "I have almost made up my mind to get married."

"You are in love?" she asked, and blushed like a girl. "Who is it?"

"Mlle. Ameline Verlaque."

Though the misfortune he announced was less fatal than the one she had foreseen, she felt deeply displeased, and in her displeasure there was, perhaps, a shade, a suspicion of jealousy. She would have been very astonished had she been told so; there are depths in ourselves into whose hidden recesses it is difficult to penetrate. She did a remarkable thing, which shows how much she was overcome. As if the thought she was revolving in her brain was of such moment to her that she could not endure any extra weight, she suddenly took off the lace covering she was never seen without, put it on her knees, and began rumpling it between her fingers.

"You are in love with Mlle. Verlaque! You, Monsieur Sauvagin! You?"

Then more calmly:

"It is ordained, I suppose then, that every misanthrope shall find his Célimène."

"Ah, allow me, Madame, she is not in the least a coquette."

"Or if she is, it is without knowing . . . . Do you think Alcestes would have been wiser to have fallen in love with Agnès?"

He answered by an impatient gesture.

"Oh, well," she said, "if you are going to get angry, what's the use of talking to me about it? I thought you were asking my advice in earnest."

"Go on, Madame, go on: I am not going to be angry."

"When a man is in love he could kill any one who ventures to lay a profaning finger on his idol. You will get into a rage with me."

"Please go on. I shall not get into a rage."

"Monsieur Sauvagin, believe an old woman, my very sincere opinion is that you would be mad to marry Mlle. Verlaque."

"Do tell me why you think so."

"In the first place, I only approve of love matches when they are at the same time in every other way suitable, and Mlle. Verlaque is as little suited to you as you are to her. A man who has the courage to marry a young girl whose beauty makes a sensation wherever she goes, so that even the passers-by in the street turn round to look at her, assumes a great responsibility. According to my humble opinion, Mlle. Verlaque is too beautiful for you."

"It's an objection that occurred to myself; I acknowledge that she was born to marry a millionaire, which I shall never be: I've no talent that way. But you must confess she has very simple tastes, and that she is happy in spite of being poor."

"I grant you that willingly, but there's another thing. One of our curates, who is not the confessor of these ladies,

and is not bound to be particularly reserved in discussing them, has often talked them over with me. When I made you jump off your chair by comparing this young lady to Agnès, I did not mean to say she is foolish, far from it! But I am always rather distrustful of these innocent girls: their ignorance is sometimes a snare to them, and as they never mean any harm, whatever they do, they hold themselves blameless. The sins of ignorance are particularly serious, because they are never repented. Yes, believe me, these Agnèses who do not clearly distinguish good from evil are a difficult charge. You would have to take the utmost care of this baby, and bring her up altogether, and to bring up a woman needs much patience, of which I suspect you of having none except for flowers."

"Perhaps so, Madame. I will try to persuade myself this *ingénue* is a flower, and to preserve her from sirocco, from sultry heat, and from insects."

"And the mother? what will you do with the mother?"

"Ah, excuse me, she is a very honourable woman."

"Certainly, but they say she is selfish, and so clever she always gets what she wants. You are a proof of it. Remember those repairs, and how she got what she wanted out of you. She would see she was not left out; you'd have to marry her too . . . . be wise, Monsieur, and steer clear of it all. It's my fault, I ought not to have sent you to these ladies. I paid the piper, and you danced. I see it all now. It was a lover's estimate you drew up for me, and this fine doing up of their rooms cost me a pretty penny."

She saw he was beginning to look embarrassed.

"I'll wager," she exclaimed, "that the agreement's already signed . . . . Oh, these folks who ask your advice! they ring the bell when mass is over."

He had to confess she was right, or very nearly so. While he told her about his expedition to Toulon and the consequences it had had, Mme. de Rins, not suspecting that one may be at the same time a man of science and a poet, was asking herself how it happened that a man who was so

intelligent, so acute, so sound in matters botanic, should have no common sense in the conduct of his life. She had also to settle another question more important to herself. What was she going to do? This marriage project was extremely obnoxious to her. She had always looked on Silvère as her property, her thing, and henceforth she was to be condemned to share him with Mlle. Verlaque. But if it is hard to share one's possessions, it is harder still to lose them. "If I oppose him," she thought, "I know him; he will treat me just as he has done M. Trayaz, and will leave me to get on as well as I can without him. This restive steed will kick over the traces, smash them, and who's to catch him then? I must be resigned, and of two evils choose the least."

After sufficient stroking of the lace on her mantilla, she made up her mind, gave a big sigh, and changed tactics. She told Silvère to forget what she had said, and declared that, after all, she knew too little of Ameline to have any right to an opinion about her, that God alone has the right to judge of hearts.

"As to the mother," she went on, "the best way to dispose of her will be to tell her at the right time that you find your summerhouse very convenient and do not mean to leave it, that I insist on having you with me, that it's one of the conditions of our arrangement, in fact, and that these rooms, which are enough for two, would not be enough for three. Of course, she would only have to walk the length of the street whenever she wants to see her daughter; but however often she came, since the place is mine, she could not feel at home. Leave it to me, and I'll help you to keep her at a distance, and at the same time, if you wish it, I will help you to look after your wife and bring her up."

"Thank you, madame," he exclaimed, in tones of deep gratitude. "As virtue is sometimes rewarded here below, you will have your reward: you love music, and my future wife sings like an angel."

This consideration seemed to affect the countess very little;

it appeared to her the angelic voice would bring her no consolation. Half an hour later, as her maid was getting her ready for bed, she said to herself: The best thing about it is that we have still ten months, and so many things can happen in ten months.

At that moment Silvère was going over all the incidents of the day, which was to be a memorable one in his life.

"What good, after all, are resolutions?" he thought, "and what unexpected consequences our actions have sometimes. If I had not gone, in spite of myself, to La Figuière, if my uncle had not offered me those millions for the creation of a botanical garden, if M. Sucquier were not a scoundrel, or if I had consented to apologise to him, I should not to-day be betrothed to Mlle. Ameline Verlaque. Ah, yes! I should have spent my life in sighing after her without marrying her. *Ma foi!* I'm pleased with my madness, and what's done is done: it will take a very clever person to undo it."

The next day, which was a Sunday, by three in the afternoon he was in the Avenue des Palmiers, certain he would not have long to wait for what he wanted. He got there so early that there was no one else about, with the exception of a young man sitting on one of the benches, bored to death in this desert, and indignant at being left alone. Casimir Trayaz had for some days been rather at variance with Mlle. Huguette Lejail; breaking her word and the most solemn of oaths, she had refused to go on the sea with him. Partly in order to turn his thoughts from his woes, partly to avenge himself on his faithless cousin, he had come to spend two or three hours in Hyères, on the chance of meeting some one to amuse himself with. Silvère had no great fancy for him; he disliked him for his imperturbable assurance, his offhand manners, the smallness of his respect for scientific truths and all the mysteries of creation, his trifling talk, and the useless pursuits that filled up his time, as much as for his ring-covered fingers, dazzling neckties, and sumptuous trinkets. Also, although Silvère did not suspect him of evil designs on himself, this dolly face, so white and pink, was a

reminder to him of his ill-luck. The sight of Casimir made him feel as if he were back in La Figuière, breathing the air of a country where for twenty-four consecutive hours he had lost his sanity, and there are some humiliating memories we flee from like the plague. He tried to get away without being seen; but Casimir, who had eyes like a hawk and the swiftness of a hare, was down upon him before he had time.

"Is it really you, *mon cher cousin?*" he said. "*A propos*, what a rough-rider you have made me! Did I not warn you, and tell you over and over again Sucquier was a man to be careful of—one of those weeds you cannot rub up with impunity? My warnings were of no use. Are you subject to such ebullitions? You may imagine how La Figuière has been resounding with the noise of your exploit, and that your disgrace is always the theme of the evening. Some pity, others admire you, as one admires a hero—without the least wish to imitate him. There's no question you were rather obstinate about it all—I'd have been more compliant in your place."

"You may be sure I do you justice," answered Silvère. "You're wise and I'm a fool. What would you have? Every one has his own nature, and every one, as well, has his troubles. You surely have yours."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Casimir, his hand on his heart.

"Tell me the truth, now; confess that if a young lady of uncertain temper, whom you have been running after now for a long time, did not sometimes amuse herself by tormenting you, you would not have come here to while away a few hours."

"My word, you are a magician! Yes, I confess that infernal coquette has been humbugging a good deal. I'll manage her, though. When she takes it into her head to be cross, I get at her by making her jealous; I take my revenge by going off to amuse myself, as you say quite truly, and I find it always answers. Hyères is a market well stocked with pretty faces, and this is the centre of the fair. Listen: a fortnight ago I saw under these palm-trees

a little Moorish beauty, who would have won the heart of a flint. This maiden made such an impression on my susceptibility that I took the trouble of finding out her name, which at this moment I have forgotten. Perhaps before long I shall see her pass by, and then I hope that before this evening I shall have got acquainted with her. I'm a man who's just as keen after a petticoat I take a fancy to, as any man of Marseilles would be after a bargain in horseflesh. Yes, *mon cousin*, you see in me the most determined, the most persevering of sportsmen, and when there's game to be got, I aim so well .... But look over there; here comes the lady, and I've just remembered her name . . . this wonderful beauty is called Mlle. Verlaque."

And as he spoke, at that very moment a lady and her daughter came into sight at the other end of the avenue, and he was starting off in their direction, when he felt himself held back by a hand which was laid on his right shoulder, and was gripping it like a vice.

"*Mon cher*," said the man, whose hand had such a grip, "I do not doubt you are the most determined of sportsmen, but some game is preserved. I took little heed of your advice; believe me, you would be wise to heed mine. Yesterday I became engaged to Mlle. Ameline Verlaque, and in ten months she will be my wife."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Casimir. "I congratulate you, *mon cousin*, with all my heart. Won't you do me the favour of introducing me to my cousin?"

"No, a thousand times no! What would the charming Huguette say? I have no intention of being an accomplice in your infidelities. Your servant! Let's keep our wares apart, and each look after his own!"

At these words he went off, after giving Casimir such a terrible look that he remained rooted to the spot.

"I must confess the jealous wretch has a grip," said Casimir to himself, rubbing his sore shoulder. "How the devil has this houri managed to fall in love with a brute who has neither face nor fortune? and when did doves begin to mate with eagles? Well, let him marry her! She

seems to me of a soft, yielding disposition; he'll have to show her to us some time; and sooner or later . . . husbands of his sort are very convenient."

Three hours later he was back at La Figuière, and, during dinner, announced that he had an important piece of news, which they had much ado to get out of him, but which he told them at last.

"You'll never guess it. A young man you are all well acquainted with, and who has often dined at this table, a savage, an impossible creature, who, I felt certain, would always be a bachelor, Silvère Sauvagin, to give him his right name, is going to be married; and Mlle. Ameline Verlaque, who has promised him her hand, is one of the prettiest girls you could find anywhere within a hundred miles."

"Fair or dark?" asked Huguette, disdainfully.

"Dark, very dark. I was introduced, and am still under her spell."

"You've met this irresistible fair one then?" said his uncle.

"He was walking with her in the Avenue des Palmiers. The minute he saw me, he began to call and make signs to me to go to them: he was anxious, of course, to make me admire at close quarters."

"That's not at all like him!" said M. Trayaz, who was not easily taken in.

"Is she really as peerless as you say?" asked Huguette.

"You know how I dislike all exaggeration: well, I declare to you that her hair is so thick and so long, that, supposing she ran short of frocks, she could clothe herself with it. I will add that her eyes are as large as this plate, and her foot so miraculously small she could put it into this salt-cellar."

"You certainly never exaggerate! Know that one may have long hair, big eyes, and very small feet, and yet be a fright."

"*Ma cousine*, I swear to you on my honour, that, were you not in existence, she would be the greatest beauty in the department of Var."

Huguette shrugged her shoulders. "That's why the savage was so obdurate to my advances," she thought. "Heaven be praised! If I had succeeded better with him, I should have on my hands a suitor who, through his own stupidity, was only rich for one night and two half days."

"Has she any money, this miracle?" asked M. Trayaz, who always went straight to the point.

"I made enquiries, Uncle. Mme. Verlaque's only worldly possession is a two-storied house that she lets when she can, and which she would be very glad to sell. Beyond her rents, which are by no means a Peru, she hasn't a farthing, and that's what surprises me most of all. I always imagined Silvère the least inflammable of men: when hunger marries thirst, it must indeed be a love match!"

"And when is this fine marriage to take place?" growled M. Trayaz.

"In ten months."

M. Trayaz gave a grunt whose meaning no one could fathom, and for some moments was turning over an idea that had occurred to him, when he remembered his affairs called him to America and that in three days he would have to embark, after which his right eye, the one he always kept half shut, and which told more than the other, seemed to say:

"Let him marry her! After all, what do I care!"

CHAPTER XII.

Two days after, all the guests at the villa were packing up to go. They had endured much tribulation and disappointment, but they by no means renounced their magnificent hopes. If little presents can not always keep alive friendships, they help us at least to wait patiently. M. Trayaz did things well, and was gracious to every one. On the last day, no one found a million under his serviette; but M.

Lejail was presented with some of the rare and exquisitely bound books he had discovered in the library; M. de la Farlède with a mare he had often ridden, and coveted much; Casimir with some costly American gems, and a magnificent scarf-pin he had secretly longed for; Mme. Limiès and her daughters received each ten thousand francs, as an indemnity for the frocks and hats ruined by the rain at Lavandon; Huguette was given four thousand to buy herself a piano; on the sturdy Jules was bestowed a pony as well as his donkey.

"Just now," his grand-uncle told him, "I cannot do without your yacht: but I promise to bring it back safe and sound."

When he had given M. Sucquier his last instructions he embarked. The sea, "that wilderness where we can never make harvest," as the Greek poet has it, has nothing to offer us by way of diversion but its storms; and comfortable crossings, which have no history, are in the end very monotonous. And yet from sheer contradictoriness, doubtless, M. Trayaz imagined life was less of a bore on his yacht than in his villa. Some of his time he spent in cogitating upon certain transfers and investments he intended to make; the rest he employed in examining his conscience, in philosophising over himself, and though his reflections were somewhat dreary, the pleasure he took in their evolution mitigated something of their bitterness. He told himself mournfully that he was suffering from the misery that attacks great capitalists whose social position is not equal to their fortune; that to properly expend enormous revenues a very full life is needed, a great *ego*, which can only be obtained on condition of having, like any princely potentate, a numerous clientèle, great obligations, and extensive responsibilities; that if the curse of poverty is to have desires it is impossible to satisfy, the torment of the idle millionaire is to feel that his means exceed by a long way his needs, that he possesses immense forces which will never be employed, and thus compare sadly the little he is with all that he might be.

"Those who consider want of money the worst of evils," he thought, "are fools; there is a far more painful one, which is mine, and that is penury of desires. The cultivated mind, I suppose, can always find wherewith to occupy and amuse its leisure; I know nothing, I want to know nothing: let others rack their brains to discover the why and the how of things, I had rather live on in my ignorance. Why have I no ruinous passions? Women have lost their charm for me; the most bewitching damsel excites me no more than a metaphysical discussion. If I had a mania for charity, I should found hospitals to prolong the existence of consumptives and incurables, and should enjoy being a professional dupe, a thing I could never endure. If I loved art, I should have a gallery and buy, or imagine I was buying, Raphaels. But the finest pictures in the world never give me much pleasure; they are saints at whose shrines I don't worship. Take away my good sense, which is the main cause of my unhappiness, or give me a love of display, and my lot would perhaps be endurable. I am the owner of money I don't use, and it's not I who possess my hoard, my hoard possesses me. The best service I could do myself would be to throw three fourths of it to the bottom of the sea. I should never do it though. One clings to what one has, and adores one's misery. A few hours ago I was dreaming how to increase this fortune which weighs me down and which I execrate; the pains a certain maniac, whose name I have sworn to forget, bestows on the cultivation of his plants, I employ in cultivating my misfortune, in increasing my cares. A philosopher has said that no one can possess in peace and comfort more than a million dollars. It's a golden saying, but offer that wise man twenty millions and he will take them, probably complaining they are not enough. Man is truly a stupid animal. What good have I got from all my toil and hard work? The gardener was right: I am rich and poor; rich in money, poor in fame and in pleasure; that's my fate; what's the good of appealing against fate? it's a court that will not reverse its decrees. I came naked into this world, and spite of the pains

I have taken to heap up possessions, I feel as naked as an earthworm under all my gilding."

Such were the thoughts he was revolving in his head. His eyes fixed on the foam track left by his yacht, for long hours together he would ask counsel of the waves, which gave him none. When people are ill, they are always inclined to think they will be better in any other place than that which they inhabit at the time, that change of air is an infallible medicine, that you get rid of your maladies, as you would of a dog, by taking them very far away, where they do not know the country. Though M. Trayaz, when he said good-bye to his guests, had told them it was "*au revoir!*" he had half decided, on leaving La Figuière, never to go back again. He was weary of Provence, tired to death of his family, and had quarrelled for life with the only one of his nephews he had really liked, and who could really have been of use to him. What would Mme. Lejail have said, what would Mme. de la Farlède have thought, if they could have guessed that as he drew nearer his destination his resolution grew stronger never to see the serious, worried face of the one, or the velvety eyes of the other again, and that when he disembarked at New York, he had firmly determined to end his days in America?

Happily for them, the wind soon veered round again. For three weeks he gave himself up entirely to business; the old fever of affairs seemed to be again upon him, he went in for an excess, a debauch of work; and he paid for it; violent palpitations of the heart warned him he was not the man he had been. He had to take care of himself, to keep his room; and though he recovered, America seemed no longer so pleasant a place to him, when he began to go about again. He concluded that his memory had been playing him false; in reality everything was just as it had been, it was in his own eyes there was a change. America certainly does not undertake to restore youth to old men, or to amuse their inaction. He had many friends in New York. Most of them had made fortunes and were continuing to add to them; some of them had become anæmic:

these thought little of their malady or were taking iron. Life, for them, was an enterprise; men were means to their ends, or obstacles; the world a place where folk elbow and push, and bustle each other about.

Their heads were full of plans, and they pitied the Provençal who had given up making them. He said to them rather bitterly: "Why do you grind in this way? And afterwards? What will you have got by it all?" And the old veteran, showing his wooden leg, would ask them to come and relieve his ennui. But an American has no notion how to treat this disease, which is unknown to him; the day an American is bored, he is ready for burial.

M. Trayaz learnt by experience that nothing makes a man feel so lonely as seeing again his old companions in fortune, whose tastes and ideas were once his, while now they have no longer anything in common. He tried to get back into their ways.

They initiated him into their plans, their adventurous speculations, and invited him to share them. He had always been great at the science of chances, the art of balancing probabilities and weighing risks. He went in now for profound calculations, which sent the blood to his head, and caused him cold perspirations followed by an exhaustion he found it hard to recover from. He convinced himself once for all that his carcase obeyed him no longer, that he had to reckon with its rebellions, and was condemned to the galleys of a life-long servitude to repose. "Hope and fear," he said to himself, "are no longer passions I can indulge in." And this man, henceforth devoid of desires, for whom hope now was only a weariness, asked himself if a sight of the scenes of his youthful days would not have the virtue of restoring life to his deadened heart.

He set out for the Rocky Mountains, and saw once more the mine which had been the foundation of his fortune: it was worked out, but he examined others in full swing; he found everything very much changed, and this time it was no delusion of his own that made him think so. Mountains formerly black with fir-plantations were now bare and

stripped, so that the rain floods poured down them in torrents, washing away earth and houses.

To make up for that he found iron railroads, where, in his time, there had only been miry paths. He visited the mills, investigated all their latest improvements, and was able to assert that great progress had been made in the methods of extracting ore. But he could affirm also that the food in the hotels was very poor, that the staple comestible seemed to be rancid lard, and that the poorest French peasant was better fed. He had grown spoilt at La Figuière: frugal in his youth to austerity, even to asceticism, he had now become a gourmand. He thought more than once of the *bouillabaisses* at Lavandon, and that reminded him how he had made M. Lejail dine in the tent so full of draughts, and how at that same meal he had treated his family to so many pleasant illusions, only to promptly convert them into instant gloom.

"I can see now," he said to himself, "their eyes like an ecstatic carp's, and the stout Bourdigue waiting to receive into his open mouth, stretched from ear to ear, a million which never fell into it. Lean or fat, they are all as credulous as greedy, and the gardener is half mad."

Bad as the cooking was, he preserved his patience. He went on, always hoping to meet some one whose discovery would reward him for his endurance: he met no one.

The men seemed less changed to him than the place. From generation to generation the seekers for silver and gold are always the same. Some gallows faces he recognised, some haggard countenances, too, of adventurers who were almost honest, and were toiling in the hope of enjoying later on what in all probability they would die without attaining. One day he caught sight of a miner whose appearance made an impression on him. It seemed to him there was a great resemblance between this thick-set toiler with his eager eyes, and his former self in the days when he had had shoulders and muscles and desires to satisfy. As he looked at him he beheld the phantom of his youth, and lived his old life once more. He remembered the intoxica-

tion of delight with which he had discovered his mine, all the alternations of hope and fear through which he had passed in its working, what a fever had consumed him, what fatal and delicious poison had ravaged his being; it is so sweet to suffer for what one loves! After sating himself with this memory, he felt its vanity, and said within him to the adventurer who was the likeness of himself: "Fool, chasing after Happiness, can you not see she has longer legs than yours?" Thus thinking over what he had been, and what he now had become, he compared himself to a man who has been watching some great drama on the stage, and to whom, under the spell of actors and play, fiction becomes reality; when this man comes out into the open air, and turns to walk back to his home, he suddenly perceives that the fog through which he is trying to find his way has turned to rain, and that the most realistic thing in this world is a dull street when it is raining. But that eager man of long ago, who had not only sought but found, and this man sick of everything, who was calling him to mind, were they one and the same? Which was his real self, this or the other? He talked with the other, he cried to him:

"Dig, scrape, work away; but when you have found what you seek, take care your illusions don't take to themselves wings. Don't take it into your head life rings hollow, or, arrived at my age, you will have, like me, a dead heart."

He came to the conclusion that he had grown too much of a philosopher to be able to pass his old age in the New World. And yet he reproached himself for the continual variations of his mood, this frequent fouling of his compass. Was it worthy of a Christopher Trayaz to change his mind and his temper so frequently? He remembered that in one of the Eastern States was a place his *other* self had much delighted in; where that self, before it fell ill and decided to return to Europe, had dreamed of building a house. He went off to visit this beautiful spot, and was just as much charmed with it as that former self that was no more could ever have been. Unfortunately he recollected that if he

built there, he would be living in a district which was under the dominion of the temperance societies that made its laws, and put under ban any one who did not rigorously abstain from the use of fermented liquors. He declared to himself that there was more liberty in the department of Var than in this free America. He thought of his vineyards: they were producing already an excellent wine, which under the management of the skilful M. Sucquier promised to become better still. He succumbed to a feeling that there in the old world was his real home, that anywhere else his old age would be more unhappy, while it was more lonely and less peaceful. Provence shares went up.

He resolved to re-embark as quickly as possible; but before going back to his yacht, he had a disagreeable duty to perform. He got out a great linen map, consulted his railway-guide, and found that in less than twelve hours he could get to a certain town, near which was a countryhouse where he had not set foot for more than seven years.

Common civility sternly demanded he should spend a few hours there. After changing his mind again and again, he tossed up to decide what he should do. Chance decided that propriety should win the day, that he should not return without going to pay his respects to Mrs. Hannah Wheeler.

He resigned himself to his fate, telegraphed to her and received her reply, and next day by lunch time the door of an elegant cottage, where his arrival was expected, opened to receive him.

The lady for whom he had so little liking, to go and visit whom went so much against the grain with him, had yet cause to be thought of by him with pleasure: she had been the occasion of his performing once in his lifetime a very creditable action, and as a rule we like those faces which remind us of our good deeds. Mr. Wheeler and M. Trayaz had had very intimate business relations. Mr. Wheeler had lost all his fortune in a financial crash, and as he was endeavouring courageously to build up another, was killed by an accident, and left his wife penniless. M.

Trayaz astonished everybody by his generosity: he allowed Mrs. Wheeler a pension of twelve thousand dollars, stipulating that if she should marry again, its payment would entirely cease. By this he probably meant to declare that his desire was not so much to manifest his generosity to a lady whose misfortunes had won his sympathy, as to show his respect to the memory of a man who had done him important services.

Mrs. Wheeler pledged herself to observe this conditon, and with her two little twin daughters, born in the year following their father's death, went to settle in a quiet country town. M. Trayaz had accompanied her there, saw her comfortably settled, and for several years went regularly to enquire how she was. But by degrees he had cooled down, his visits had grown rarer, and when he went away to present his native country with a sight of his old bones and his dollars, he had been nearly three years without seeing her.

They were entirely opposed in character, and in all their thoughts and feelings. After a frivolous youth she had settled down to an extremely religious middle age. Devoting herself to good works, she became the principal patroness in a Methodist congregation, under the direction of a Mr. Milson, a wordy preacher, but skilful dealer with souls, into whose hands passed a considerable portion of M. Trayaz's bounty. He often quarrelled with her about her pious liberality, which he designated fradulent transfers. She replied by exhorting him to become converted, and talked to him of the worm which dieth not, and of the lake of flames and sulphur. Of all subjects of conversation these were the least likely to please him. She did not conceive she was under any obligation to make concessions to her benefactor, and in their stormy debates this woman, whom he had formerly known nervous and irritable, exasperated him by being able to put him out with her invincible and phlegmatic impassiveness. He said to her: "Madame, you have never had any common sense." She calmly replied: "My dear Sir, if you are regretting your money, take it back." In spite of

everything, he gave proof of a long-suffering of which no one had supposed him capable, by continuing, after his return to France, to forward Mrs. Wheeler's pension with religious punctuality, undiminished by a farthing.

She welcomed him more ceremoniously than cordially; treating him with all the consideration a powerful protector has the right to expect from his protégés, without quitting for a moment the reserve necessary in talking to a man with whom it is impossible to approach any delicate subject without bringing on a painful discussion. While they talked, they observed each other. She noticed that he was just the same as ever, his glance just as keen, his speech as curt and imperious. On his side, he remarked involuntarily that at forty-five this woman, who had been extremely good-looking, was a mere wreck of her former self, that she had purchased the salvation of her soul at the cost of her beauty. In twenty minutes they had said to each other all they could without quarrelling. Happily, the twins then appeared, they went in to lunch, and conversation which had begun to flag, revived.

After his examination of the mother, M. Trayaz set to work to study Meg and Sally. The last time he had seen them, they were still children; now he found them much older; they had just entered on their twentieth year, and were new acquaintances to make. Thin and pale, wearing their short hair parted on one side, narrow chested, and dressed in tight-fitting frocks, which were made perfectly simply, straight up and down garments in fact, that might have been called regular sheaths, or a kind of casing; they struck him as odd, even strange; and yet, though they were far less good-looking than Mlle. Huguette Lejail, they pleased him more. He grew interested in their boyish heads, deliberate manner, open, loyal faces, and the grey eyes which looked him straight in the face and had nothing to conceal. In repose, their faces were so much alike, they resembled each other to such a degree, he could not distinguish one from the other; as soon as they grew animated he could no longer make a mistake.

Meg's looked the stormier nature, her brows were severe, and her nostrils could dilate very haughtily; Sal looked the owner of a sweeter disposition, and her grey eyes seemed always smiling or dreaming.

"And yet," he said to himself, as they rose from the table, "I shouldn't wonder if she turned out the self-willed one of the two. Like a certain young man I know, she has the softness of the violent."

He went off into the garden with them, and amused himself by making them talk. He had not to question long before he was convinced, to his great satisfaction, that their mother had not bestowed upon them her own disposition, nor succeeded in inoculating them with her theological virus, that they had little love for the Wesleyan doctrine, and had placed their affections elsewhere. Meg, who had studied in a college for both sexes, and attended the lectures at a neighbouring university, had a great passion for natural science. Sally preferred literature; she worshipped the great poets, specially those who were obscure. She composed verses herself, and confided to M. Trayaz that she had had the joy of getting into print, without revision, in a magazine that had a circulation of two hundred thousand copies. He invited her to give him a specimen of her talent; at once she recited a dainty little poem, a sentimental, symbolical description, which seemed to him a regular bit of bombast. He chaffed the two sisters about what he called their hobbies, joked and teased them unmercifully. They fell in with this game, which amused them, and defended themselves so prettily, that before long he was great friends with the hobby riders, and decided to avail himself of Mrs. Wheeler's chilly invitations to prolong his stay.

There is nothing like the chatter of young girls to brighten up an old man who is bored. M. Trayaz enjoyed his afternoon, the most delightful, it seemed to him, he had spent in his three months on American soil, and felt disposed to be gracious to the mother on account of her daughters. But that evening a cloud came on his horizon. After dinner there was ushered into the drawing-room a middle-aged man

very precisely dressed, very formal in manner, long, straight and white as a wax-candle. The appearance of Mr. Milson had on M. Trayaz the effect of a red rag on a bull. He could not forgive this shepherd of souls for levying contributions on him, and appropriating his dollars. Mr. Milson hardly condescended to take any notice of him, but sat down at once by Mrs. Wheeler, and they began to talk over their small affairs together as if they had been alone. After containing himself for some time, M. Trayaz joined in the conversation and discharged at the collector of dimes certain epigrams whose acerbity did not appear at all to disturb him; but Mrs. Wheeler, in spite of her customary self-control, seemed very much offended.

"Calm yourself, my dear lady," said the clergyman in his most sugary tones. "The spirit of God blows where it lists, and one day it will blow upon M. Trayaz."

Furious with indignation that any one should be impertinent enough to declare that one day the spirit would breathe upon him, M. Trayaz was going to make some hot reply, when he noticed that Sally was looking at him out of the corner of her eye, with the forefinger of her right hand on her lip. Her meaning and gesture pleased him, and he held his tongue. Mr. Milson at last took his leave, and offered him three fingers as he said:

"Good-bye, Sir. May the grace of the Lord be with you!"

M. Trayaz accepted the three fingers, and replied: "The only grace that can touch me is Sally's."

For the next few days while Meg and Sal were regaling themselves, one with a great treatise on physiology, the other with Tennyson and Browning, M. Trayaz and Mrs. Wheeler were having long tête-à-têtes. He asked her for explanations, hunted up big or small matters of dispute, and their colloquies always ended in a quarrel. But she gave him, one day, without a word spoken, a lesson which taught him to be more circumspect.

It was one morning when he had reproached her for not looking after her garden.

"Why should I look after it?" she answered. "Thanks to you, I can afford to keep a gardener."

"And the said gardener," he retorted, "seeing no one looks after him, lets everything go to ruin. Do you expect him to care more about your fruit and vegetables than you do yourself? Why, you have some espalier pears over there which are painful to see. The wall they are trained to is getting old, the coping is dilapidated, and three of the props are on the ground. It's a shame! Think a little less of God's vineyard and a little more of your pears."

She raised her eyes to Heaven without replying. Her silence irritated him.

"You neglect your garden," he continued, more angrily still, "and you don't look after your cook. Yesterday she gave us a slice of salmon which was not as fresh as it might have been, with sauce which was no inducement to eat the fish."

"I have never learnt to be a cook," she told him.

"Nor your daughters either. Allow me to tell you your way of bringing them up is directly opposed to all common sense. They are charming, and I am very fond of them, but that's not your fault. If they are learned about many things they have no need to know anything about, in some things their ignorance appals me. I asked them to sew me on a button: they are so kind they would not refuse me this little service, but knew no more how to set about it than how to fly. And look here, they stitched it on so carefully that it has cracked already, and in another week will be off. You are strange creatures, you American women. You expect the utmost reverence, to be treated like princesses, and truly, in this country men are willing dupes; it never seems to enter their heads that a wife should be of any use to them. No, you are made to be worshipped, to be queens on your thrones. Ah, as long as you are rich, it's all right. You American women excel in the art of giving elegance and charm to luxury, in doing the honours of a drawing-room, in carrying on learned or light conversations. But when fortune flies off like my button, then you are ut-

terly at a loss. One must go to France to find women who can give poverty a grace; our Provençal ladies, madame, do not read Tennyson, but there are very few of them who cannot cook a *bouillabaisse*."

"What's a *bouillabaisse*?" she asked carelessly.

"It's a delicious dish which neither you nor your daughters could prepare. There's another thing, to-day they are well off: who knows what may happen to-morrow?"

"Ah, allow me to remind you, *you* are seeing after that."

"Madame," he went on, "no one knows what may happen, we must be prepared for everything, and I am not immortal. If the goose which lays your golden eggs were to die, what would you do? I know there is abundance of the grace of God in this house; will it keep the pot boiling? . . . My fortune! well, my fortune's my own, and it seems to me I have a right to do what I like with it. You know at home I have relations who are most devoted to me. I'm not particularly taken with their fawning and prostrations, but as that waxen-faced clergyman who is such a great friend of yours said the other day, the wind blows where it listeth, and I've my fancies like most men. Save out of your income, madame; don't squander it, but put away something every year, give a little less to church rats and mice. I tell you plainly, it's possible the whole lot will go to Provence, and I shall leave you and your Milson and your two daughters nothing but my old clothes, and four pairs of eyes to weep for me."

She uttered an indignant exclamation, and lifted her head to give him such a long, expressive look that he lost countenance, his eyes fell, and the conversation dropped. This look which said so much, and to which he had found no reply, pursued him the whole day. It was her first signal victory over him; and he profited by his lesson to play a more careful game, and treat her more considerately.

His happiest hours were those spent in the garden with the twins. One afternoon he got them on the subject of wishes, and asked them the same question he had put to his assembled family.

"If some generous donor," he said, "should offer you a million of money, tell me, *mesdemoiselles*, what would you do with it?"

"Are you reckoning dollars or francs, Sir?" asked Meg: and she added with disdainful lip: "Your French millions are such poor things!"

"Meg's right," said Sally: "One must be able to do without; but if you're going in for money at all, you ought to have any amount."

"Just listen! what an appetite!" he exclaimed. "These chickabiddies want to swallow more than they can manage. Well, I'll deal magnificently with you, and count in dollars. Better still, we won't say an exact sum. If by chance you got from somewhere an enormous legacy, now, what would you do with it?"

"I should use some of my income," said Meg, "to establish big scholarships to be awarded to the young men of science who wrote the best treatise on questions of philosophy proposed by myself: I should send others on missions to the four corners of the globe with orders to make great discoveries."

"I see," answered M. Trayaz, "that you make the authors of treatises and the explorers in your dreams, young men. It's a sacrifice the scientist has to make to the woman. And you, Sal, how will you spend your millions?"

Meg answered for her sister:

"I know what she'll do. She'll go and hunt through the world till she finds somewhere a *prince charmant* she has seen in her dreams, and she'll offer him her fortune and her heart."

"You don't know what you're saying, Meg!" exclaimed Sally, "and you quite misunderstand me. I am not the sort of girl to run after princes: when I'm rich I mean to marry a young man who is very distinguished and very poor. I shall want him to have known privation, to have suffered, and endured, and gone through much. I will spin him a golden, silken leisure, and he will owe me everything, and be boundlessly grateful to me."

"And you'll fatten your pig till he's no good for anything any more."

"Oh, I'll manage better than that, and you are quite wrong," she replied rearing her head and trying in vain to spread out the skirt of her tight, unadorned sheath. "Know, Sir, that on occasion I shall understand how to be stern as well as mild and shall treat him according to his merits. I shall wield birch rod and stick, and see that he keeps straight, that he gains his Paradise by good works. . . . I have always thought," she added, "that perfect happiness for a woman is to have a man of genius to govern."

He stroked his chin complacently.

"Sal," said he, "I've got the very thing you want." And he told them the story of Silvère Sauvagin, whose name he had vowed never again to pronounce. When he had finished, Meg said, with a frown on her brow,

"This young man is no true lover of science. When science is in question, pride has to go, and for her sake we must make our excuses to M. Sucquier."

Sal had grown thoughtful:

"I don't agree with Meg," said she, "I like the young man for what he did."

"You would consent to marry him."

"Oh! I should ask to go and see him first. An American girl doesn't get engaged to a man before she has seen him."

"That's the worst of it. He's not handsome."

"Perhaps, *mon bon monsieur*, you and I have different ideas about manly beauty."

"Another difficulty: he's as restive and fantastic as a mule, and even if you were to throw at his head your fortune and your dear little person, he's quite capable of refusing one or the other."

"I should like to see him!" she answered in a tone of offended dignity. "You may be sure I have a stronger will than he."

"Miss Sally Wheeler, I swear to you by your short hair and mouse-coloured eyes that you would waste all your

trouble. Because, they say he is in love with a girl in Hyères as fair as a May morning."

She collected round her knees the folds of the skirt she no longer wanted to spread out, and said:

"That's another matter. He must marry her then. I've never poached on any one else's preserves."

They had come out of the garden, after which they had walked through a meadow, and were chatting together seated in the grass under the shade of a sycamore tree. It was very hot; the twins began to regret they had brought no fruit to refresh themselves with.

"How thoughtless you are!" he said. "Your mother has some peaches which, thank Heaven, are doing better than her pears. I have got three or four of them here; I am a man of foresight."

They did not know how they were to get them peeled. He told them that if you have common sense, you always carry a little knife in your pocket. He handed them his, and while they were peeling the peaches said:

"I've had it now for forty years, and it has never left me. One of its blades has lost its point, and half the ferrule is gone; but I never want to have it mended. I've always looked on it as a kind of fetish. Whether it has brought me good or evil luck I cannot tell you: it has helped me to amass a big fortune, it has not taught me to enjoy it. Your good mother, *mesdemoiselles*, is firmly convinced that God can change stones into bread: I am rather inclined to believe he changes bread into stones by way of amusement. My fortune seems to me a very indigestible morsel; it's a stone in my stomach. Little girls, little girls, believe in my unhappiness, and give up your castles in the air."

At these words he took back his fetish and hurled it fifty yards away into a brambly thicket.

"Oh, what a pity!" said Sal, who was superstitious.

She ran off to hunt it up among the thorns. As she had sharp eyes and much perseverence she found it again, brought it back in triumph, and gave it to its owner, telling him in French:

"*Mon bon vieux, monsieur*, here's your little knife back again to lose."

He did not thank her, but, like Polycrates getting back his ring, thought that it was written, and put the double-bladed knife into his pocket.

Many things had perplexed him since his return to America; in the days which followed he was still more perplexed. He was ceaselessly thinking over a design which, according to the colour of the sky, the direction of the wind, or his own feelings, seemed to him reasonable or extravagant, sweet or bitter. He spent a sleepless night in pacing his room. Next morning early he went down to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Wheeler in an arm-chair, holding a big Bible on her knees. Like Whitefield she believed in stichomancy. Opening by chance the holy book, she drew from the first verse her eyes fell upon an augury for the success or failure of her undertakings. He joked her on the childishness of her proceedings; then, with a change of tone and of expression, after a few questions, he suddenly said something which so much agitated this impassive woman that she grew pale, and two big tears rolled down her cheeks.

"What you have always refused," she murmured, leaning back in her chair, "you now offer me of your own accord. Laugh at me if you like; the verse my eyes fell on when you came in was: 'The mountains shall melt like wax at the eye of the Lord.'"

"Devil take your mountains and your wax!" said he. "Your mania, madame, is to spoil for the folk who do things for you, any pleasure they may find in doing you a good turn."

What gracious favour had he granted her? She had often asked him to give her once for all the capital of the income he allowed her. For good reasons, in which Mr. Milson counted for something, he had always emphatically refused to do anything of the kind. Was he giving in at last, or was it that, finding she had a lover in her mind, he had consented to release her from her vow, and annul the

stipulation in their contract by allowing her to marry again? Whatever it was, in a few minutes she sent for her daughters, and in M. Trayaz's presence gave them, in a voice broken by tears, certain long explanations which astonished and disturbed them, and which they heard with lowered eyes, in profound silence. The widow had in her service an old nigger woman who, like Mlle. Huguette Lejail, had a bad habit of listening at doors; but her hearing being less acute, and her imagination apt to distort things, her indiscreet tales were always most improbable. She spread round the neighbourhood a report that Mrs. Wheeler had been asked by M. Trayaz for the hand both of Meg and of Sal.—"What, both?" people said to her. To which she replied that it must be so in the marriage of twins; that they always go together; and to have one, you must marry both.

What is certain is that for several weeks M. Trayaz had some important business on hand with the office of the French Consul, and many discussions with Mr. Milson. He never thought for a moment of going back on the concession he had made to a protégée who had the gift of irritating him. Between fits of cheerfulness or gloom, in his solitude he reproached himself for having been too good-natured, too easy; but at sight of the twins, he congratulated himself on his good work.

The day before he left, he went for a last walk with them, and told them their mother had promised to bring them to see him in the spring and to stay some months at La Figuière.

"Capital!" said Sal: "you will introduce me to your original young man."

"Just now," said he, "we are at daggers drawn, and I never make friends unless my conditions are agreed to."

He did not go straight on to New York; but stopped on the way to visit a Mr. James Brodley, of all his friends the one he most prized, the only one (which is a rare thing in America) who, having had misfortunes and losses, had come away from the game without attempt to avenge himself on Fortune, and get back his money. He had enough

means to live in ease and comfort; so he retired from business, and settled down in a very pleasant country house where he was living happily with his wife and children. Since his youth he had had a passion for historic research, and during the thirty years he had been a banker, had managed every day to give a few moments to his favourite study. For ten years now he had given himself up to it entirely. He was at work upon a very learned history of the buccaneers, and sometimes would go off with a light heart to hunt up documents in the libraries, or revisit the Island of the Tortoise; sometimes, seated for hours before a black-walnut table, he would cover with close writing big folio sheets, which he tied up at once with red tape. Dividing his days between his affections and domestic cares, his garden, his books, his écritoire, Michel the Basque, and Monbars the Exterminator, he never had, so he told M. Trayaz, a moment's ennui or bad temper, and M. Trayaz easily believed him. The handsome old man, so nimble and active, fresh and jovial, with his serene eyes, and cheerful complexion, his wide brow crowned with abundant hair as silky and as white as the fur of an Angora cat, suggested an idea of unclouded felicity.

"Man is not made to live alone," he said to the *ennuyé* millionaire, as he did the honours of his library, "and one can never be really happy away from the company of beings and of things one loves. There are times when, however much I may esteem him, I get terribly tired of Mr. Brodley. I like to get rid of him and forget him—and that is what study helps me to do; without leaving my room, I journey round the world, and at the same time am both very stay-at-home and a great traveller. It has been my opinion since my earliest years that the present is not enough for us, that the future does not belong to us, and that to extend one's being it is necessary to be interested in what exists no longer. I pity minds that have no horizon and no past."

"Pity me!" answered M. Trayaz.

He felt his unhappiness stealing upon him again in this

happy house: nothing makes us more miserable than the sight of a happiness which is out of our reach. He left his friend with a firm resolution to find happiness in his own way; but how to set about it? From the moment he left New York to his arrival in the bay of Lavandon he did not cease making plans and rejecting them. He had hardly landed when he came back to his first, the Botanical garden, which was to give occupation to his idleness, console him for his inconsolable millions. He swore he would get round his nephew; he said to himself it is easy to deal with a lover.

"I will enlist that lovely girl in my interests," he thought, "I will get her on my side; where she goes, he will follow."

CHAPTER XIII.

DURING the six months M. Trayaz had spent in America, Silvère's love affairs had taken their course, not without many annoyances caused by the capricious jealousy of the dragon who guarded his treasure, and whose goodwill he had continually to purchase, but if he lost his temper sometimes, there occurred none of those hitches Mme. de Rins had foreseen and hoped for. He had understood pretty quickly that Mme. Verlaque meant to undertake his education, to make him pay dearly for his happiness, and that he would only gain it by onerous servitude. She had expounded to him from the first her theory of what was due from him, and shown him that as there were ten months to the marriage, mishaps might in the meantime occur; that he would have to reckon with the cooling down, the repentance which leads to broken engagements; that consequently he must abstain not only from every proceeding that might in the remotest way compromise her daughter, but from attentions assiduous enough to be commented on, so that even his visits were not to be too frequent. In laying down her rules of conduct, she seemed to be saying: "If you break a single

one of our agreements, everything is at an end!" But at the same time she gave him to understand that it rested with himself to win from her by his good conduct relaxation of her severity, and a modification of the rigour of the law. They were only allowed to see each other once a week; every Sunday he dined and spent the evening with her; but she had never allowed him to be alone with Ameline; she was always on the spot; looking sometimes indulgent, sometimes threatening, always listening attentively, always on her guard, and allowing nothing to escape her memory.

He was in love; and lovers put up with a good deal. And yet, though to his great displeasure, he was not allowed to talk to his lady love alone, to make her confide in him, question her or examine her at his ease, still he was under no delusions as to either the capacity of her intellect or the force of her character. He knew that her exquisite pliancy was only the dangerous yieldingness of a too easy nature; that, not knowing how to hate, she was incapable of loving deeply; that her smile promised a hundred times more than she could perform; that she had no virtue but her ignorance, and that as the serpent had not yet spoken to his dove, no one could foretell what she might answer him. He knew also that between her and the man he himself was, could be no affinity of tastes, temper, and thoughts; that she would never take an interest in his work; would never have any succour to offer him, only but astonishment or indifference, that she would be an eternal stranger to him. He never ceased to adore her; it seemed to him that her beauty would take the place of everything, that it was the flower he wanted to adorn his life. He had had to correct his definition of love; he no longer looked upon it as an act of faith, as a transmuted confidence; she inspired in him none. He had recognised that it is an intoxication of eyes and heart, a sorcery, a magic, a delicious madness, as nature will have it. And, as in his character of botanist he respected with sincere devotion all natural laws, here again he submitted without understanding, and rejoiced in his madness.

While he was meditating on the mysteries of love, Mme. Verlaque was speculating within herself as to the best means to employ for bringing her son-in-law to what she wanted. She was too shrewd not to have perceived that he was very intelligent, and had every quality that could win success. Talent, in her eyes, was so much capital to be invested at a big interest, and the science of investment appeared to her the first, the most admirable of all. The more she was disposed to do justice to this young man's merits, to grant that nature had showered on him her best gifts, the more she grew indignant at the small, humble use he had so far made of his property. She undertook, in her own mind, to form him, and teach him how to set about making his way in the world. She soon discovered that unfortunately he was not easily managed. She was too clever to think of carrying by violence a place so well defended, too persevering to be discouraged by the fatigues and weariness of a long siege, and she had begun to dig her trenches.

Her method, when she encountered resistance, was to multiply incidentals by attacking at first accessory details to which she affected to attach much importance. After she had brought upon herself many small refusals, which she submitted to with a good grace, she insinuated at the very last the main question, when she was able to say, as it were: "See how good-natured I am, I have given way on every point. Now it is your turn, reward me for my kindness by granting the trifle I at last ask of you." The trifle was always the whole question, the only thing she really cared about. One of the first questions she put to Silvère, reduced to its most simple expression, might be translated into: "When you are married, what will you do with me?" He replied with all sorts of circumlocutions that by the terms of his agreement with Mme. de Rins he would continue to live in the summer house she had had done up for him, and that this arrangement, which would answer very well for two people, would not do for three. She seemed to find this a cruel decree: but thought after all, what did it matter? She reckoned upon being able, at the right time, to instruct

Ameline to declare herself absolutely resolved never to be separated from her mother. Then she enquired if, upon the occasion of his marriage, Mme. de Rins would be likely to increase his salary to any great extent. He replied that the countess, who was not as rich as was generally supposed in Hyères, had only lately raised his salary, and that he considered it a point of honour not to ask for a further rise. She returned several times to the charge, insisting for form's sake; for to her it seemed a matter of course that with a little management she could easily induce M. Trayaz to do something for the young couple. When one has a very rich uncle, and knows how to deal with him, one has a right to cherish a higher ambition than that of being gardener in perpetuity to Mme. de Rins. It was on this tacit condition she had yielded her daughter to Silvère: she had no intention of making her a gardener's wife.

After various small skirmishes and several repulses therein, she one day gave battle and asked if he had told his uncle of his intention to marry. He answered that his uncle was in America, and perhaps would never return.

"He will come back," said she. "You may be sure he'll come back. You have spent two weeks in his house; it would be a want of common civility to let him learn from public report a family event which is sure to interest him very much."

Silvère tried some miserable evasions, saying he did not know where to write. She very justly replied he could find out at La Figuière, where M. Trayaz must of course have taken the precaution of leaving his address. He broke off the conversation; but she came back to it the following Sunday, and week by week grew more urgent. After all his subterfuges, thus forced within his intrenchments, he had to speak out: he explained that M. Trayaz was a man of hard, unyielding character, that they had agreed very badly, and a serious misunderstanding had been followed by such coolness that they had not parted good friends; but he did not dare to relate the incident which had brought about their rupture, so sure was he of being neither approved nor even

understood. She was dumbfounded. What! was it possible to push ignorance of life, and stupidity in its conduct to such a degree of imbecility? Were there then intelligent young men who could not govern their tempers well enough to keep from quarrelling with an uncle, who was rolling in riches, about a mere trifle. While he was telling her his story with the embarrassed air of a man who does not want to be untruthful, but who does not want either to tell more than half the truth, she observed him with the attention of a naturalist studying some rare insect; she was very glad to have found out exactly how that sort of animals was made.

When he had finished:

"It's a bad beginning," she said; "but when one has made a mistake, it must be atoned for, and it doesn't seem to me this will be difficult to set right. All the more reason therefore for writing!"

Ameline was present at these debates, but was indolent and inert, taking neither side, while her smile approved first one, then the other of the disputants: her mother had not yet thought it necessary to order her an opinion on this capital point. After all, it was in vain Mme. Verlaque brought all her eloquence to bear, Silvère would not write; but this time she was resolved not to give in. One day when he came to dinner he was made wretched by finding that Ameline was not well and he could not see her, so he had to spend the evening tête-à-tête with his mother-in-law, who laughed up her sleeve at his discomfiture. Next week she played him the same trick, shut his divinity away from him, and the day after, a very short little note came to tell him that mother and daughter had gone to pay a visit to relations. They were away a whole month, during which time he had no word from them and was devoured by anxiety; at times he feared Ameline was lost to him, he despaired of ever seeing her again, and had to summon all his courage to keep himself from starting off to find her. She came back, he saw her once more, and was so agitated and nervous at finding himself near her again, that Mme. Ver-

laque crowed inwardly over her happy expedient. She thought these weeks of privation and anxiety had sufficed to soften this hard heart, ripen the green fruit, convert the sinner to a state of grace. Evidently he was safe, perfectly safe; his love offered all the symptoms of a serious case. She could flatter herself that now she had him, that the fortress she had besieged and reduced to extremities would soon yield, and send her its keys on a silver salver.

One afternoon, as she was sitting alone in her little yellow sitting-room, busy with some linen she was mending, and dividing her attention between her repairs, and this one fixed idea of hers, which mingled with every other, their old maid-of-all-work came up with a card in her hand to tell her that a stranger, a little pale man with a long pointed nose, wanted to speak to her.

"Someone I don't want to see!" she thought.

But no sooner did her eyes fall on the name on the card, than she cried out and changed colour. With her skill in getting to know things, she had found out some days ago that M. Trayaz had returned from America, and, from morning to night, sometimes from night to morning, she had been turning over plans, studying continually how to find out by what means she could finally induce Silvère to introduce her to the mighty man. What a piece of good luck! he had made the advances: and here he was in her antechamber, asking to speak to her. Her only anxiety was of the kind a spider might feel, on seeing caught in her net such an enormous fly that she begins to doubt whether the web is strong enough to hold such a rich capture. But Mme. Verlaque controlled her emotion, dissimulated her delight, and as she was not a woman to throw herself at people's heads, it was with a calm, dignified air she received the man of millions.

He soon thawed her. He had been described to her as a gruff, repulsive old man; she found him quite genial and with a certain amount of ease in his manners, and she said, in her happy surprise, that, in execution, certain enterprises one has made bugbears of, are more easy than could have

been believed, that inaccessible roads may get cleared, and impassable mountains be levelled as if by enchantment.

"Do not be surprised, madame," he said, "that I have taken the liberty of coming to see you. I knew, before I left for New York, that your daughter had become engaged to a young man who is related to me, and in whom I am interested."

"Ah, monsieur," she interrupted, "he is indeed worthy of the interest you take in him, and of your goodness to him."

And thereupon she began a pompous eulogy of Silvère, enumerated the good qualities of his heart and mind, and declared that each day she felt more and more interest in and affection for him.

"Yes, madame, I grant you," he replied, "that he is a very clever boy, and when he likes, can be very agreeable. But between ourselves, he has all sorts of queer ideas it is difficult to reckon with, and at present we are at feud. I intended to give him a brilliant future: he made me angry by his puerile obstinacy in refusing me a little concession I asked of him, and I confess to you I am not accustomed to refusals."

He told her the story that three months before under the shade of a sycamore he had related to Meg and Sally, but this time he was not so long about it, he proportioned the length of his discourse to the degree of sympathy inspired in him by his audience. Mme. Verlaque seemed stupefied. It was for such a futile reason, for such a trifle, that Silvère had fallen out with his uncle, and with fortune. It seemed so incredible to her that she would have refused to believe him, if it had been allowable to doubt the word of an old man who only reckons by millions and has no direct heirs.

"We must be merciful," she said, looking with a pitying eye at a photograph of Silvère hanging on the wall. "Our young man joins to great virtues some small faults. He is quick-tempered, and does not always weigh his words or the consequence of his actions. Some things must be for-

given to the young, provided they acknowledge their errors. He never told me of this stupid outbreak, but he has often spoken to me of you, and always in terms of affectionate respect."

"I am ready to forgive everything, madame. It's possible to fall out and make friends again—so the world goes, but I give nothing for nothing. Yes, if, as I venture to hope, we can take up our great plans again, Silvère will be bound to come and see me often and talk things over with me at La Figuière, and how can he come there without meeting M. Sucquier? I don't mean to have a nephew whom I like, and an agent who is useful to me, living like cat and dog together. But I mean to deal royally with him all the same: I will excuse him altogether from making an apology to the man he has called a rogue; I simply require that the first time he sees him, without making any allusion to the past, he shall shake hands with him. You must allow I am letting him off very easily."

"I should consider him a raving lunatic if he refused so easy a condition, and I'm sure he will be eager to accept it."

"I am not so sure as you are, *chère madame*, and I flatter myself I know him very well. If we want to succeed we must not urge him too much, nor hold a pistol to his head. You will tell him from me that I give him eight days to make up his mind and let me know his decision. Believe me, it will be no easy business, and for its accomplishment I trust less to your eloquence than to Mlle. Verlaque's beauty, of which I have heard so much. Shall I not see her?"

Mme. Verlaque went out, and returned at once, bringing back her daughter who was in a Cinderella negligence of attire, without giving her time to don a better frock, give a touch to her hair, or put a ribbon anywhere. What was the use? Ameline had that insolence of beauty that can scorn with impunity superfluous decoration and precautions. She pushed her before her into the brightest part of the room, and taking her by the chin, obliged her to lift up her head

and show her face to M. Trayaz. She seemed to be displaying her wares, and her eyes said: "It's not a second-rate commodity. Here she is, quite unadorned: judge what she will be when I have dressed her properly."

It was M. Trayaz's turn to be astonished; he contemplated in silence this miracle of beauty, and found he had not been told the half of the wonder.

"Peste!" he said at last, "my nephew has taste and it's not only in orchids and azaleas he knows how to exercise it."

"Ah! take care, monsieur, you are going to spoil her for me," said Mme. Verlaque, with an affectation of being horrified.

"Come, come, madame! You'll not make me believe she doesn't know what she is worth."

"By a happy contradiction, I can say she does and does not."

"Well, I want her to know, and to behave in this matter like the most barefaced coquette. It's on her manœuvres I am counting to gain my case . . . . Mademoiselle, it's not enough to have fine eyes, you must know how to use them: do you ever make use of yours?"

She looked modestly away from him, then back again, and without any premeditated design, her eyes were so tender, caressing, and persuasive, that he exclaimed:

"Indieu! if this obstinate young man's malady resists such a medicine, I pronounce him incurable . . . . *Madame votre mère* will explain to you, mademoiselle, what we want you to do. Indeed, this little business deserves that you should take some trouble to bring it to a happy conclusion. Your own future is at stake; we want to make you a happy and worthy lot in life. Wealth means happiness, or at least they say so, and I don't think you despise the houses where there is plenty of money. Know that I am very generous to little girls who espouse my interests; but though the *bon Dieu* may reward us for our intentions, I only look to what is performed, and never reward except for the accomplished services that are rendered me. Let those lovely eyes open a

campaign, and let's hope they'll not have to keep up fire too long! Prove to us that if young men propose, it's the little girls who dispose."

She only very vaguely understood his words, but there seemed to her a secret charm in his somewhat rough speech, and she liked listening to it. He went away, leaving Mme. Verlaque overjoyed. Her little yellow sitting-room seemed to her to have undergone a complete metamorphosis: a great thing had just come to pass there, it had been visited by a lofty personage, an august being, a god straight from Heaven, and she looked lovingly at the disreputable old velvet armchair where Jupiter had been seated . . . . But these satisfactions of her vanity only brought her a superficial, fleeting joy: it was the solid she was attached to. Jupiter had declared that he loved his nephew, and had said, too, he was very generous to those who did him a good turn. She looked ahead into the future, and saw Ameline in possession of a great fortune that her mother would have to look after for her; she saw her surrounded by opulence, and living in great style, in a big house of which she had the management.

This active woman did not waste much time in vain imagining: the next minute she had on her bonnet and cloak, and was off to Mme. de Rins's garden. She found Silvère in the summerhouse grappling with two heaps of seeds he was examining with a magnifying glass. She looked at him for a moment without speaking, but not without smiling, then she said:

"Allow, *mon cher monsieur*, that you are a very odd young man, that you are perfectly strange and unaccountable in fact!"

"What strange and unaccountable thing have I been doing?" he asked, offering her a chair.

"You must confess that if you use your wits to help you study your seeds, you do not often use them in your own affairs."

"What do you mean? *Chère madame*, do explain yourself."

"Well, to begin with, you could not have been particularly sane the day you refused the most magnificent proposals, rather then say two simplest words of apology to a man you had called a rogue."

"He is a rogue, madame. Oh, be certain he is . . . . But who ever has been telling you . . . . ?"

"You'll know by and bye. First, say your *peccavi.* Eh! *bon Dieu!* I can take your word for it the agent has not a perfectly clear conscience. Are you certain you have never been polite to Sucquiers of even more damaged reputation?"

"If that has happened to me, it's because I did not know what they were at the time. But I do know him—the very recesses of his black soul.—Yet, once more . . . ."

"You are arguing like a child, and you have more luck than wisdom . . . . M. Trayaz has just left me," she added, bridling, "and has consented to overlook everything, and carry out the plan he was telling you of."

Silvère was overwhelmed with delight, and his face grew bright, but it was only for a moment.

"M. Trayaz always makes conditions," he said; "did he ask you to communicate them to me?"

"This uncle, who seems to want nothing but to shower gold on you, is the most easy going of men. He will let you off the apology: the first time you meet M. Sucquier, you are to shake hands with him, and everything is settled."

"Touch that hand!" he exclaimed, with a face of loathing.

The cup he was to drink made him feel sick.

"Yes, what a baby you are!" she went on drily. "Is M. Sucquier a leper—has he the plague?"

"It's worse than that, *chère madame.* Would to Heaven he were one mass of leprosy! my hand would soon be in his."

She was one of those women who are more cunning than skilful. She easily read character, and what was passing in another's inmost heart; but, led away by her strong feelings, it was more easy for her to find the word that upsets and

irritates than the word which reassures or persuades. She could not keep to herself what M. Trayaz had said to her, and exclaimed:

"What a work it is to have to reason over things with someone who is utterly unreasonable! Yes or no, if you are reconciled with your uncle, and he creates this famous garden you are to be manager of, will you be able to do anything without seeing him frequently?"

"Of course not."

"And when you go to Figuière, will you meet M. Sucquier there?"

"That's equally certain, unfortunately."

"Then I conclude the most elementary common sense would force you to live after that on good terms with him."

"And I conclude, *madame*, that after once shaking that unclean hand, I shall have to shake it again every day, and I have not the courage to contemplate such a prospect; you condemn me to penal servitude for life. And you may as well understand I shall gain nothing by my performance; my uncle, as I have once before had the honour of telling you, is a headstrong man, as obstinate as a mule, and I confess that I myself too am obstinate. I'm afraid we should hardly be reconciled before we fell out again; he would be the benefactor, I his debtor, and in defending my dignity against him, I should always appear ungrateful. Believe me, it costs me much to refuse his offers; I know better than any one else could, how much I lose by doing so: this peremptory man has a great mind, he will understand, and think more highly of me for my refusal. Who knows? Perhaps some day he will again be my friend without conditions."

"Oh, what an opportunity lost!" she said, rising; "and there are opportunities which never occur a second time, like birds at which you never get a second shot. But I can't believe your answer is final. M. Trayaz, whose kindness knows no bounds, gives you eight days to think everything over in: I only give you forty-eight hours. I shall look for you on Wednesday morning, and if your reply is not satisfactory . . . ."

She did not finish; she had just been on the point of saying: "The marriage shall be broken off!"

"In the meantime," she went on, with a forced smile, "I shall see if there's a fairly comfortable lunatic asylum in the neighbourhood, where I shall have you shut up for the rest of your days. My friendship for you will compel me to require that you shall be treated with all the consideration due to a great botanist, who has not always his wits about him."

And with that, she abruptly left him, furious at having pounded her head against a wall, and beaten against a rock. She liked well-ordered hearts and minds; the incomprehensible peculiarities of this obstinate young man made her furious: she would have loved to strangle him with her two hands. But then he was precious, sacred to her; as long as his uncle loved him, he was worth his weight in gold. How could she think of breaking with him before she had exhausted all her store of patience and all the resources of her art?

CHAPTER XIV.

If he had employed the whole reprieve of forty-eight hours that had been granted to him, in thinking the matter over, Silvère would not have altered his resolution. In forming it, he had only consulted his instinct; it had been, as it were, forced on him by his physical nature, and when his reason intervened and approved, it was interfering after everything was settled. His generous ambition, highest interests, his future as a man and a scientist, Ameline's happiness, which was dearer to him than his own, everything bade him say yes, and yet he did not lose a moment in deliberating, in balancing for and against. He felt that in saying no, he was yielding to an inner force which was more mighty than himself; that there are fatalities to which we must give way, decrees which are unalterable, and downfalls for which love itself and its joys cannot console.

At the hour and day Mme. Verlaque had assigned, he went to her house. He was told she had gone out, and not daring to go against her orders, he was just turning dejectedly away when the sitting-room door opened, and a very sweet voice said to him:

"Don't go, Monsieur Silvère; mamma will be back before long."

She turned back swiftly; and next moment, he and Ameline were sitting down together, opposite each other; the fierce chaperon had relaxed her fearful vigilance, and for the first time they were alone. Such an extraordinary occurrence, so memorable an event ought to have made him suspect something. Ameline too was not herself. Her serene countenance for once testified anxiety and mystery, there was trouble in her large, peaceful eyes, and a less unsophisticated lover than Silvère would have guessed that this unawakened heart was shaken by a sudden fever fit. Delighted with his good luck, he noticed nothing; he only knew that he was alone with her, that she was adorable, and that he adored her. He opened his mouth to tell her so, she gave him no time to begin.

"You have brought your answer: I know it will be the one we want, mamma and I."

"Alas, I am more sorry than I can say that I cannot do what you wish. I keep to what I said, it is impossible for me to submit to the cruel operation they want me to undergo."

"And yet it is such a little thing!"

"What seems little to some people is a very great thing for others. I confess I am not of a very yielding disposition. Are you sure that to yield is always a good thing? If ever I meet M. Sucquier, I will remember one must never be uncivil; but I repeat they are asking me too much."

"I thought," she murmured, "I fancied . . . . no, I never expected this."

By degrees the light had gone out of her face, her smile had died down like a lamp whose oil is exhausted, con-

trary orders had been received, the fête had been countermanded, and the lights were being extinguished. He thought he saw tears in her eyes, and it made his heart bleed.—"Oh, what a brutal villain I am to make her cry!" he thought.—But whatever his remorse, his resolution remained unchanged.

He left his place, came and sat down by her, and took her two hands.

"Believe me, I hate disappointing you."

"If that were true, you would not disappoint me."

"Listen to me, I will explain everything to you; I'm certain after you have heard it all you will understand, and sympathise with me."

And he set to work to explain everything to her, the present, the future, past events, the position of affairs at the moment, differences of disposition, conscientious difficulties, the laws of honour, what things there are a man may long to do, and yet be unable to. He did his best to be clear and precise in his explanations; his arguments were convincing, urgent, and his talk as incisive as his voice was tender. He soon saw he was wasting his trouble, that his words made no impression, that Ameline was only half-listening to him, that most of the time her mind was elsewhere, and that when she was listening she did not understand half of what he was saying; that the mind of this innocent maiden was a very primitive little harpsichord which had but few notes, and some of its strings even were broken: it was only possible to perform on it the simplest airs, child tunes or rustic songs; it could not go beyond that, and its répertoire was very small. Did anyone try to teach it a more complicated music, it responded badly or not at all.

"I have not persuaded you?" he asked her.

"No," she replied, shaking her head.

"But you will understand that I must have very strong motives for refusing to consent to a reconciliation which would put me into a position to give you the surroundings you deserve! . . . It's in a golden vase I want to see growing the plant I love."

"If you loved me you would do what I want."

For a moment she seemed to be thinking over something, perhaps she was trying to call to mind her lesson, to make sure she had remembered it properly, was omitting nothing, leaving nothing out.

"It's not any idea of advantage which tempts me," she went on, "and poverty has never had any terrors for me. This sitting-room is dingy and badly furnished, but I am happy in it. Do you know what is necessary for happiness? It is peace, and your obstinacy makes me fear you are hard-hearted, that you do not know how to forgive, and care more for your spite than your affections. One day I heard some one say you were obstinate and bad-tempered: and I was sorry. To-day you hate M. Sucquier; to-morrow you will have another enemy, whom you will hate with a mortal hatred, and there will always be some face you have a dislike for. What I hate more than anything is quarrelling, disputing. I want the man I marry to be the same, to like to live at peace with every one, and hate, like myself, everything that embitters the heart, and spoils one's life."

"I swear to you," he said, "peace is for me, as for you, the most precious good of all; but you would not have me purchase it by dishonour."

"Dishonour! It is not dishonourable to acknowledge one's errors, and repair them. You get very odd ideas into your head sometimes, and you argue too much. Did I argue when you asked me if I would consent to marry you, and I answered yes at once, perhaps thoughtlessly even? . . . No, you do not love me."

He was at her feet—on his knees, saying to her:

"Look me in the face, your eyes in mine, and dare to tell me I do not love you madly."

"If you loved me, you would say yes."

"Ask me anything else—prove me in any way you will."

"That's what every one says in such cases," she interrupted. "When a young girl consents to marry an unkind man, he is always ready to offer her anything she doesn't

want, and refuses her the one thing she wants . . . . No, you do not love me."

She fixed on him her big black eyes, whose power M. Trayaz had revealed to her. For the first time they kindled, and it seemed as if she were trying to concentrate their ardour on this criminal at her feet, whose resistance was beginning to give way: so the enameller, armed with his blow pipe, directs his flame on to the metal he wants to melt. Silvère felt all his courage melt away in his breast. It was much worse when, taking his head in her two hands, she bent over him, murmuring softly:

"Say yes . . . . I will love you so much."

And then two burning lips were pressed to his. This unexpected, delicious kiss, scattered his wits altogether. He felt suddenly transported into unknown regions, breathing the air of an enchanted country, where, it seemed to him, conscientious scruples, the laws of honour, the refinements and delicacy of a soul jealous for its nobility, are as nothing; where our pride can be easily consoled for the blows we give it, and the woman we love never demands anything that is not reasonable and just; that the first duty of a man with any feelings is to give her no cause for tears, and to wish what she does; that obedience to her is a joy, servitude an intoxication; that the only events in a life which count are the kisses we have received, and the kisses we hope and long for.

His emotion was so great that he had not noticed Mme. Verlaque's entrance, and that she was untying her bonnet strings and looking at him with severe eyes, which reproached him very plainly for taking unpardonable liberties in her absence and for unworthy abuse of her confidence. Ameline had risen.

"Ah, mamma," she said, "don't scold us: he consents to everything!"

Mme. Verlaque's face grew soft immediately, she held out her hand to the repentant rebel, and said in a voice that was almost motherly:

"I thank you, monsieur, in her name and mine."

Silvère had been accused of reasoning too much: in this case he did not reason with himself at all. It never entered his mind that he had been caught in a trap; it never occurred to him that this little scene, of which he cherished a delightful recollection, had been concerted between a most politic and designing mother and her docile daughter; that in words and gesture, in everything, Ameline had been reciting a lesson she had learnt, playing with much naturalness a rôle she had probably had to rehearse. It was so sweet to him to feel himself loved, that he would have warded off doubts as we ward off misfortune, or as we would keep off a gad-fly. Any way his consent had been extorted or surprised out of him, and he could not go back. Mme. Verlaque wrote at once to M. Trayaz to inform him of the happy results of her negotiations. To which M. Trayaz answered by return of post that the day after, he would arrive in Hyères, would put up at the Hôtel Continental, and would be glad if she would come to lunch with her daughter, and prospective son-in-law. He took care to add that he meant it to be a pleasant meeting and that M. Sucquier would not be present.

"My uncle," thought Silvère, "likes to get things over as quickly as possible, and you might cut off my head, if I do not find M. Sucquier waiting when lunch is over."

But Mme. Verlaque and Ameline petted him, and showed so much gratitude that he gallantly resolved to swallow the dose, and rocked his conscience to put it to sleep or prevent it from crying out.

Two days after, on a grey November morning, Mme. Verlaque was walking to the Hôtel Continental, accompanied by a young girl who, after experiencing recently great emotions, had resumed once more her usual placidity, and a young man whose mood it would be impossible to describe, so mobile and changing was his face that day. Though his guests were early, M. Trayaz was waiting for his nephew as if nothing had ever happened, and giving him three little taps on the shoulder, said:

"I am delighted to see you again, my boy!" They

went to lunch and he showed he had not by any means lost his appetite in America. He showed also he could not win a battle without his face bearing witness to his victory. His eyes seemed to be sparkling over with mirth and his long, pointed nose, which he was continually rubbing, seemed to positively laugh. He was happy, too happy, and allowed it to be too apparent. He was infinitely grateful to his nephew for having been so easy to deal with, but thought less of him for it. He wished him every kind of good, but found him diminished in his estimation; in fact, it seemed to him this young man was actually a good many inches shorter.

"That's just how it is!" he said to himself: "he carries his head high, is touchy about his honour, flies out at the least offensive word, and makes no end of a fuss; then he reflects, puts up with everything, stands anything, all for the prayers and wiles of a woman. No, we are not any way alike, he and I. Of course, in the days of my youth, I never sacrificed my interests to my pride; but I always managed to save appearances, I never was quite so inconsistent. In his place, I would have used some artifice, I would have found some pretext or other, so as to come out of the trial with the honours of war. What would you have! if he takes after me, at any rate the race has degenerated, and he knows it well. He looks pleased, but not proud."

And as his thoughts often reverted to Miss Sally Wheeler, who had certainly made a great impression on him, he next decided:

"I told Sal the first chapter of the story, and my tale appealed to her imagination: the rest of it will quite disenchant her. I will write to her this very evening, and tell all about this young fighting-cock's vanquishing, that there was clay in his heart of iron, and her enthusiasm will receive a blow."

Silvère on his side was saying: "How triumphant he looks! he is not a man to spare the defeated!"

From the beginning to the end of the meal M. Trayaz never stopped talking; happiness made him eloquent. He

lavished compliments on Ameline, saying no end of pretty things to her. Sometimes he called her his daughter.

"More than once I have dreamed of marrying and having a son," he said to Mme. Verlaque, who was more skilful than himself in controlling the excess of her delight: "this boy will take his place."

He was imprudent enough to add: "I never thought of him as a lover, and would never have dreamed that one day a pair of lovely eyes would hold him prisoner. I congratulate you, my boy, you'll be all the better for it. *Ma foi!* I pity the man no woman has ever forced to go against his nature, nor ever deprived of his reason. There was a time when I went mad over them! though, indeed, there never was a time in my life when I made a fool of myself for them. You understand the distinction, *chère madame?* And since then I have settled down and the day has come for my harness to be taken off; I know a brunette from a blonde, that's as much as I am capable of. I, who never read, did manage to see somewhere, that somebody said of a great man, whose name has escaped me, he always had an old head, even when his shoulders were young. Here you have in two words a résumé of my little biography."

And yet although he boasted he cared no more for women; his thoughts were again of Miss Sally Wheeler: he was comparing her with Ameline.

"With this girl of Provence, and that American girl," he was saying to himself, "it's the difference between sunlight and moonlight. All the same, I like the American best! This girl is a picture, a statue, an ornament; her bosom is perfect, but no one knows what there is inside, and I presume that generally there's no one there. The other, with her flat chest, is a house without architectural beauty, but well kept and always inhabited. It would be better to say she is a clock that goes well, never stops, and whose ticking you can hear a long way off. Happy the man who uses her to know the time, and sets his watch by her. But men are fools, and their passions temporary insanity."

Then he talked to them of his friend M. Brodley, declaring he was of all men the one he admired most; the only player who, in his acquaintance, had had enough strength of mind to leave the game after a loss; and the only man whose old age was happy.

"Why did I never acquire and cultivate from my earliest youth," he exclaimed, "some violent hobby, a love for butterflies, or a passion for old books? But now I can manage without writing a History of Buccaneers. Our Botanical Garden, Silvère, will lighten the tedium of my old age. I feel like a father to it already. Let us drink to its success, my boy: it will be drinking to yours, too! . . . By and by we will go for a drive, and choose out our site. But I shan't trust the purchase of the grounds to you. Bargaining requires a little mystery and diplomacy, and you are the least diplomatic of men. I have at hand someone who is a master-hand in affairs of that kind; we'll employ him to open the campaign, and what he saves us will serve to increase the salary of *M. le directeur*."

At these words, Mme. Verlaque's face shone with pleasure, Ameline's expressed a sober joy, and Silvère felt himself attacked by melancholy and gloom.

"Oh, of course, it will be his business!" he thought. "The usurious and dishonourable agent will eternally overshadow my garden and my happiness, and to complete my misery, I shall be under obligations to him."

He had hardly eaten anything, and had drunk nothing. Now he tried to drown his misery by drinking one after another two bumpers of Château-Lafitte. A few minutes after they left the table, went down into the garden of the hôtel, and began to walk around it together. The fatal moment was approaching, and the Château-Lafitte had taken no effect. Silvère was beginning to wish from the bottom of his soul that some catastrophe, fire, flood, or earthquake, would force the most pitiless of judges to put off the execution of his sentence; but the elements do not disturb themselves to spare us our humiliations.

Suddenly he saw approaching from the end of one of the

walks, a stout man, who, however shortwinded he might be, was doing all he could to hurry: misfortunes are always in a hurry to arrive. Never had M. Sucquier's ugliness been so repulsive to Silvère; and yet he had done all he could to adorn himself for the ceremony; he had a big gold pin in his tie, and his gloves, like his hat, were quite new. He stopped for a second to take breath; then came on again, took off his hat to Mme. Verlaque and Ameline, as M. Trayaz presented him to them. That done he turned round, and came towards Silvère Sauvagin, who was a little distance behind. Though his expression was rather humble than proud, Silvère suspected him of having a mocking smile on his lips, and fancied he could hear the last cry of his agonising pride: "I am dying: will you not save me?"

At the same moment he saw that M. Sucquier had taken off one of his gloves, and was holding out his hand. He tried to stretch forth his own to shake it: his muscles refused to obey, his will was powerless against the physical impossibility he had spoken of to Mme. de Rins. He suddenly drew back his hand, and plucked at his beard, stammering:

"Ah, it is mightier than I! . . . . I cannot help it—I cannot!"

And turning on his heels he fled. Mme. Verlaque tried to call him back.

"What are you thinking of, madame?" thundered M. Trayaz. "Let the fool go!"

CHAPTER XV.

SILVÈRE SAUVAGIN felt no remorse for having broken his lover's oath. He had loyally tried to do violence to his nature, and had been overcome, after discovering one must not mistake one's own strength, that there was in himself another self not under his orders, which, born to command, refused to obey. But he could not forgive himself for hav-

ing, under the magic of a kiss, entered upon a rash engagement, and promised the impossible. To his regrets were added the most harrowing anxiety. The little woman with the plump cheeks and hard nature upon whom his fate was depending, would she not make him expiate his fault by a long exile, perhaps, worse still, by an open rupture? Had he not shut for ever the gates of his Paradise? Tormented by his doubts, he felt he must know at once what he had to fear, and the evening of that same day he went to see Mme. Verlaque, with sorrowful heart and bowed head. Her welcome surprised and delighted him. She lifted her hands to heaven, then she began to laugh, and said:

"I have to laugh or I should cry. What a comedy you treated us to, and what a strange man you are!"

Seeing her mother laugh, Ameline laughed too.

"If any one had told me," went on Mme. Verlaque, "I would not have believed it: but since I've seen it, I must."

The whole evening through, they laughed at, and made fun of him. And he bore everything with a good grace; what they inflicted on him seeming to him very mild punishment in comparison with what he had deserved.

He would have been less astonished if he had known that, as he rushed away from them, M. Trayaz, in a sudden fit of bitter, sarcastic mirth had said, with half-closed eyes: "Certainly, my poor Sucquier, he detests you very cordially . . . . We won't say good-bye, madame, we shall meet again before long . . . . My charming child, I kiss your hands . . . ." From that Mme. Verlaque concluded that Silvère had thrown a spell over the millionaire, that the damage done might soon be repaired, that in any case she had better not be in any way precipitate. Her only revenge was to double her maternal solicitude, and be relentlessly on the watch that Silvère should never get her daughter to himself. She looked after her with as much care as one might exercise in keeping one's harvest from the greedy beaks of pillaging birds. However much this tried Silvère's patience, he consoled himself by the thought that before long their positions would be changed, and that he in his

turn would defend his field against his mother-in-law; at the same time he promised himself to consign to eternal oblivion him whom he called the great illusion-vendor.

"My uncle," he said to himself, "has realised that I am an intractable beast; he has given up the idea of making my fortune by placing me under the yoke of his tyrannical friendship, and thinks no more of me: I'll think no more of him."

He was much mistaken; his uncle thought of him very often. Feeling the bitterest resentment at the wrong that had been done him, but unable to prevent himself from holding the wrong-doer in high esteem, M. Trayaz would in turn have liked to rejoice over him and to send him to the devil, and sometimes felt like doing both at once. He had said to Miss Sally Wheeler, "He's a boy who has no equal." If Silvère had taken M. Sucquier's hand, he would no longer have been anything in his uncle's eyes, but a young man like every other young man, and he would have treated him accordingly. Now he felt a secret admiration for him, and was furious at his resistance. He swore by all the mines of gold and silver in the universe that he would take every means, fair or foul, to get over this obstinate youth and his bravado, that he would master him, bring him to his knees before him, make him say like the Prodigal Son, grown tired of living on husks: "My father, I have sinned before Heaven and before thee, make me one of thy servants." It was a matter he had made up his mind about, and it appeared to him a hundred times more interesting than the formation of a Botanical garden. He had at last found a task worthy of him. This man, who liked a conflict, had now a great stake to play for and win. He was no longer bored, but felt himself young once more.

He corresponded regularly with Mr. Brodley. Some days later, he enclosed in a letter to him a note which he asked him to forward to Sally: "Your hero," he wrote to his young friend, "has gained the first move; I vow to you he shall lose the second. I will make him lose all the tricks." She answered him: "This young man interests me

very much; I beg you won't use bad means to get your ends, but treat him fairly; be careful with him, and don't cheat, or I shall come to his help."

"Poor little girl," he thought to himself, "what can she do for him? He has two big defects: he is short of cash and in love. His too empty purse and too full heart will put him in my power."

By which it may be seen how dangerous it was to be loved by M. Trayaz, and that there were manifest contradictions between his feelings and his actions.

He meant to reduce this young man, whose frankness and nobility of character had won his affection, until by his degradation of him he had given the death blow to all that made his charm, all that gave beauty to his life and value to his character. One must suppose that the admiration he felt in spite of himself for virtues so uncommon, was accompanied by a secret vexation, and weighed upon him uncomfortably, that he even took umbrage at them because he envied them. He tried to persuade himself, they were mere outward show, that the worth of a soul is not known till it has been under trial, that the purest and proudest are at the mercy of chance: and this arch tempter amused himself by bringing such to trial, and lying in ambush for them: when they fell, his malignity rejoiced and his pride was avenged.

He sat about at once re-peopling his house. He had only to give the word, and his family were around him, all the more eager in their attentions, that they had feared from the length of his stay in America, he had made up his mind to stay there. By the middle of January La Figuière was again in possession of all its guests of the preceding winter. The walls of the Red Drawing Room heard once more the soothing tones of Mme. Limiès and her accent of mild authority, Mme. Lejail's grave voice, and Mme. de la Farlède's bird-like warble, Jules's snores, Huguette's rather shrill laugh, Casimir's loverly speeches and boastfulness, the corpulent Hector's rose-coloured prophecies, and the ex-préfet's lugubrious jeremiads.

This second stay announced itself better than the first.

M. Trayaz seemed fresher, more active, much cheerier. No one suspected the reason. When they congratulated him on his improved appearance he answered that he was sleeping better, and that sleep refreshed his blood. They found too he was more considerate and thoughtful for his guests, even M. Lejail agreed that he was; he only allowed himself the most innocent epigrams: when one is preparing for an important campaign, there is no time for the diversion of a smaller war. What astonished everyone most of all was that from the very first day he ceased to spend his evenings in working with M. Sucquier; he announced that henceforth he would spend them with his family, that he wanted them to enjoy themselves, and amuse him. They did not know that before long he was expecting to entertain three American ladies, one of whom was particularly dear to him; that he meant them to be happy in his house; and for that end wished to get his household in order, make a pleasant place of it, so that Sal would not be dull there.

He possessed a rich collection of foreign costumes, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese dresses, and Red-skin head-gear and weapons. He put all this wardrobe at the disposal of Casimir, whom he called his *impresario*, and it was understood that twice a week they should have a grand representation of charades and tableaux-vivants. Casimir, who was very clever at that kind of thing, hastily put together a comedy in verse for two characters; it contained a pretty lively love-scene, which Huguette, a very clever little actress, consented to play with him. The play had such a success it was decided to give a big public representation. Among the visitors at Lavandon were two families from Lyons of M. de la Farlède's acquaintance, who knew everybody, and these people from Lyons had themselves relations in Hyères. They were invited over to La Figuière with their friends, and these advances were received with *empressement*. So there was one evening, in a villa whose owner passed for one of those bears who don't know how to dance, a dinner for more than thirty guests. The dinner was sumptuous, the servants irreproachable, and the performance afterwards

pronounced perfect. The guests from Hyères returned home at midnight by a special train M. Trayaz had chartered for them. They all agreed in saying he was wonderfully humanised, that no one could be more hospitable, that as Huguette said, he had suddenly grown a delightful old man.

But while he was enjoying himself, he never lost sight of his vast and mysterious machinations; still, he did not hurry himself, he meant to make sure of everything. An opportunity, which seemed to him excellent, presenting itself, he sent off his agent on a secret mission, charged to make reconnaissances, and as M. Sucquier was an admirable detective, learnt from him all he wanted to know.

Seven or eight years ago, a Marquis de Coulevreux, from the north of France, had come to settle in Hyères. This nobleman, who was slender of figure, rather delicate in health, and of very attractive face, added to strict religious principles a very cultivated intelligence, great distinction, and exquisite manners. From his first arrival, every one had been interested in him, all the more perhaps because of a certain mystery that seemed to surround him; his conversation was rich, varied, and full of charm; but no one succeeded in making him talk about himself. It was generally believed that after losing his wife in the very flower of her youth, he had wished to take orders, but that a prelate who was a dear friend of his, had dissuaded him. He did not wear the ecclesiastical coat; but, as some one had said of him, he was like an ecclesiastic secularised. The freethinkers in Hyères held it for certain that he was connected with a most powerful religious order, and was one of those Jesuits; in disguise who live in the world and work secretly in the Saviour's vineyard. It is all very well to hate the Jesuits; when a great veneration for religion is allied to mental seductions, charming manners, and a smiling face, whose owner does everything with grace, one is always tempted to believe the Jesuits are somehow responsible.

M. de Coulevreux had many friends, both in the winter

colony, and among the local aristocracy, which was very exclusive. To this pacific, irresistible conqueror all doors and all hearts had been opened. In the time when Mme. de Rins had still gone out sometimes in the evening, she had met him at the house of some mutual friends. Though she was slow in acknowledging it, she submitted to his charm. They became friends; attraction was soon succeeded by warm admiration, then by absolute confidence. Little by little she told him all her thoughts and all her doings. He exercised a great influence over her; she did nothing without consulting him. Her confessor was a curate from Saint-Louis, rustic in mind and manner. She wanted a director: she had found one, and gave herself up entirely to the wishes and advice of this man of the world, who was also a saint.

He came to see her regularly, and sometimes as he went through the garden, had come across Silvère; but they had never spoken to each other. Now and again he would ask Mme. de Rins if she was still pleased with her gardener: her replies were short and evasive. The most confiding women never tell everything, the most irreproachable have always something to hide. Mme. de Rins had never told her revered director of what infinite value Silvère was to her, what a place he held in her life; she would have feared to make him jealous, and that he would have blamed her for being so much attached to a young man who respected her faith without accepting it, and who demanded respect for his own, which might be reduced, she believed, to a worship of the divine harmony of the universe revealed in its jessamine and roses. She merely said he was a very steady young man, very gentlemanly, absolutely honest, very hard-working, very clever at gardening, and that, possessing more talents than one, he was teaching her to paint in water-colours. M. de Coulevreux thought it was quite right she should have this pastime and had not questioned further. All she wanted, to be perfectly happy, was a gardener who was beyond compare, and could teach her botany; and a spiritual adviser, who would take

charge of her conscience, and teach her what she must do, or avoid doing, to gain the Kingdom of Heaven. She possessed these two treasures, she meant to keep both of them. As he did not take the least interest in plants, the marquis had not felt any anxiety to make closer study of this scientific horticulturist, who was devoted to the cares of his profession, and when he met Silvère, greeted him with that exquisite politeness from which he never departed, but also with the rather disdainful indifference that is felt by a man whose charge is souls, for the man whose charge is a garden.

A good many English families spent the winter either in Hyères, or in the big hotels built on the Costebelle hill, where Queen Victoria once stayed. M. de Coulevreux had for some time been cherishing a plan: he longed to found an Anglo-French college for young ladies, where the education would be carried on in four languages. Endowed with a subtle intellect, a warm heart, and great elevation of sentiments, he ennobled his cleverness by the generous uses to which he devoted it. He had long reflected on the best means to employ for gaining an influence over souls. Everything, in his mind, revolved round that idea, and when he proposed to himself to endow Hyères with an Anglo-French College, he had other secret intentions. Mme. de Rins was one of the few persons to whom he confided them.

"My first care," he said to her one day, "will be to have a very select staff. Our professors will be capable, intelligent men, of course with university diplomas, learned in all modern discoveries and methods, but firmly convinced that, however important it may be the young should be well *instructed*, it is far more important that they should be *educated*, and learn that an omnipresent God can alone order our actions and desires. It will not be enough for me that their instructors' piety should be enlightened and solid: I shall require that it be pleasant, lively, and attractive. Ah, my dear *Comtesse*, I shall even see to it that their faces are so too: I shall not expect them all to be Antinouses, but whoever has a sad or melancholy or unattractive face will

be pitilessly dismissed. Yes, I shall expect them to be pleasant to look upon, pleasant to listen to. The first virtue I preach to them will be discretion. I shall enjoin on them to respect the beliefs, prejudices, and errors of the young Protestant girls who come to our school, and any one who tries to make a conversion will be called to order. I don't believe in reasoned-out conversions, nor in the power of formulated syllogisms. Many Englishmen have been converted by spending Holy Week in Rome. If we can not offer to our English girls magnificent festivals and brilliant ceremonies, the true God will enter into these rebellious reasons by their hearts. Finding amongst us men of great merit, severe in their principles, easy in their manners, of cheerful, open, serene temper, and perfectly happy, they will say, spite of themselves, 'A faith which inspires such charming virtues must be the true one.' The historians of literature attribute much to the influence of surroundings; it seems to me their influence is still more strongly felt in the histories of consciences. The doctors of our times cure many ills by change of air: it is a treatment I consider just as efficacious for minds as for bodies. *Ma chère comtesse*, I mean the air breathed in our college to be so sweet and mild, that our English girls after they have left us will try to find it again when they are away from us, and will feel the need of breathing it all their lifetime."

The plan was a splendid one, but it is a costly undertaking to endeavour to act upon the English heart or the English imagination. M. de Coulevreux knew the English well enough to know that they judge, by preference, of the inner man from his exterior, and that, to attract them, his college must have a fine appearance. He did nothing rashly; in the first place, before attempting anything, he meant to make sure he would be able to collect sufficient funds. His own means were small, and two thirds of his income went to the poor. It is hard to be rich in plans and poor in money; but he had many friends, and levied contributions from them. Mme. de Rins, who was generally held rather careful with her money, told him to tax her as high as he pleased: he

took care not to be too hard on her; but made a tour of the district, calling on all the notabilities, to explain to them, without revealing his secret intentions, how much the establishment he wanted to found would profit Hyères, and the chances his subscribers would have of a good interest on their deposits. He did not go to La Figuière. After finding out all he could about M. Trayaz and his opinions, he judged that he had nothing to hope from this enormous purse, whose owner was not particularly choice in his ways of refusing to open it.

These were the details collected by M. Sucquier. M. Trayaz found them satisfactory, and testified his gratitude to his emissary by an affectionate little grunt: it was his way of acquitting himself of an obligation.

Some hours later, he got Mme. Limiès into his room and told her without preamble he had an important service to ask of her. Then without entering upon superfluous details, he declared that his nephew Silvère Sauvagin was a bad-hearted fellow, ungrateful, insolent, and his pet aversion; that he had vowed deadly animosity to him, of which he meant to give him ample proof, and that the members of his family who helped him in his vengeance might be sure of his gratitude. He expressed himself in such tones of intense irritation that his sister believed him perfectly sincere: she did not suspect that his feelings for the culprit were much more complicated than he had said, that he wanted the sinner's amendment, not his overthrow.

He went on to speak to her of Mme. de Rins, and the authority and influence M. de Coulevreux exercised over her, and gave her an account of the marquis's plans.

"I don't altogether know," he said, "why this marquis has not honoured me with a visit, nor put me on the list of his subscribers. In truth, I suspect him of being a sly fox and of secretly working for the conversion of the little English girls in Hyères. But, however indifferent I may be about their conversion, I am a good fellow at bottom, and I would rather they should become fervent Catholics than sour Methodists."

And he started off on a violent diatribe against Wesley and the Wesleyans, and above all, the Wesleyan female, who thinks herself the dispenser of the Holy Spirit, and while saying, "it bloweth where it listeth," sends it to blow where she pleases.

"Those women," he said, "are always acid and ill-tempered, and I prefer a Jesuit in disguise infinitely."

Mme. Limiès could not guess that at that moment he was speaking of an American woman, Mrs. Hannah Wheeler, whom he never mentioned to any one.

After this digression, he returned to his subject:

"What will astonish you very much, you who are so easily astonished, is that I mean to put myself down for a subscription of fifty thousand francs to their Anglo-French college. What will astonish you less is that you are the person of all others I have chosen to convey them to M. de Coulevreux's own hands. You seem to me to have more zeal than your daughters for the glory of God: such a mission is by right yours. But zeal is not everything, we want intelligence here, and I'm going to see if you possess it. Try to understand me without asking for further explanations: I hate long discussions. Open your two ears . . . . Are you listening attentively? . . . One day when I was out driving with that worthless fellow I want to punish for his bad behaviour, he said something or other which sounded rather queer to me, and made me think his opinions are not very orthodox, nor his belief very sound. I asked this free-thinking Catholic how he managed to live on such good terms with Mme. de Rins, who is so religious. He replied to me, straightening himself up, that she had never asked him to make any professions; that if she had meddled with his private affairs of conscience, he wouldn't have stayed with her a day longer. I can quite believe him: he's a lunatic who has never said to himself a beggar is bound to make concessions, that it's only allowable for men with an income to have principles they refuse to depart from, that to do so is a luxury forbidden to any one who has his bread to earn."

Upon that, shutting up entirely his right eye and looking at her with his left, he said:

"Have you understood me?"

She had understood, and a fuller explanation would have been superfluous. She was naturally intelligent; even if she had not been, a hen hunting out food for her chickens can perform on occasion miracles of sagacity and industry.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE began her campaign next day, and at two o'clock went to call on M. de Coulevreux, who lived in a modest villa in one of the faubourgs of Hyères. She was extremely well received: she brought fifty thousand francs as a free gift, as a first instalment. It was an unlooked-for offering, and seemed to have fallen from Heaven.

The marquis, after expressing the warmth of his gratitude, set to work to prove to her that M. Trayaz was putting his money to a very good use. He represented to her how likely it was that the college he was anxious to found would attract to Hyères a numerous colony of visitors. He insisted on the international character he meant to give to an educational establishment where young English girls and young French girls, brought up side by side, would learn to know and love each other, and get rid of the stupid and unfortunate prejudices they might have acquired. He pointed out to her the advantages of a polyglot education, quoting to her the saying of the Emperor Charles V:

"Every language we learn is another sense acquired." He mingled with his commonplaces various witty and ingenious remarks, and she found there was a grace in everything he said; but he took care not to repeat to her what he had confided to Mme. de Rins, whom he knew to be as discreet as the grave.

She listened with much deference, but also with a little anxiety. It seemed to her there was more charm than au-

thoritativeness in him. She asked herself if this brilliant talker, who possessed such powers of insinuation, had any talent for commanding, if he were truly one of those directors of consciences whose advice is an order. Had he such dominion over Mme. de Rins that he was certain of being obeyed if he required her to dismiss a young man she could not but be pleased with? She feared M. Trayaz had been deceived by false reports, but she changed her mind when, having exhausted his topic, he brought her by insensible degrees to give him a detailed account of the generous donor who was treating him so munificently. She hastened to tell him that M. Trayaz had for a long time grieved her by his indifference in matters religious, but that, during his long stay in America he had been thinking seriously about things, and had recognised the superiority of the Roman Catholic religion over all the Protestant sects, that his conscience was now awake, and she had the happy assurance he would grow old and die a son of the Church. She noticed that for some moments M. de Coulevreux wore quite another expression, that his eyes which till then had been distrait and a little wandering, began to shine with an extraordinary light, that he had an eagle glance, and that force sometimes can have a graceful exterior.

"I thank you sincerely for your good news," he said. "I am happy to think that one day this remarkable man will be altogether one of us."

Feeling sure of his ground as he had not done at first, he hazarded other questions. She spoke to him of her two daughters, whom she described to him as Christian mothers entirely occupied with their children, whom they were teaching to hold the things of this world of no worth, but to fix their thoughts on the next. Then after a pause:

"Alas!" she went on, with some emotion, "they say every flock has its black sheep. Our family has too."

"Who is this black sheep?"

"Why should a young man who has extremely good qualities, and they say great talents, give us so much anxiety? His father, who had lost everything before his death,

left him penniless. He cherishes a grudge against society and against God, and professes atheism openly; it is the more unpardonable that under Providence he has a very good situation, which he has managed to keep so far, and yet his temper gets worse and worse. He came a short time ago to spend a few days at La Figuière and scandalised us all by his cynical talk, and his bitter profanity. My brother remonstrated with him in quite a fatherly fashion, and he took his remonstrances so ill that they quarrelled hopelessly."

"What is his name?"

"He is the son of my late sister, Mme. Sauvagin, and certainly he got nothing but good from her, for she hated unbelief."

"Are you speaking then, Madame, of Mme. de Rins's head-gardener?" the marquis asked gravely.

"Certainly. We are too much interested in my nephew not to rejoice that we may feel he is with a woman more capable than any other of reconciling him with the saving doctrines and Christian virtues. We expected much from the good influence she could not fail to exercise on his proud, bitter spirit: we hoped she would exact church attendance from him: faith comes often by performance of such duties. Mme. de Rins, however, has not felt the responsibility of her charge of souls. M. Trayaz one day asked Silvère if the *comtesse* had never enjoined on him to attend the Easter communion, if he had had no difficulty with her about it.—'Not the least,' he answered carelessly: 'She is as tolerant as religious.'"

"Tolerance," replied the marquis gently, "is a virtue, and sometimes it is a weakness. We ought to hate unbelief, and love the unbeliever as a brother—of all our duties the most delicate to fulfil."

And with that he changed the conversation.

Shortly after, visitors were announced; and Mme. Limiès went away very perplexed and very doubtful as to the success of her mission. It seemed to her the Marquis had taken the matter very lightly, and she trembled lest M. Trayaz,

disappointed in his attempt, would accuse her of clumsiness and of wasting his fifty thousand francs. Another disagreeable thing happened to her. Just as she was coming out of the villa, she saw her nephew hurrying down the sidewalk on the road to Saint-Topez, and if she had been a moment later they would have met face to face. She hastily looked the other way, and gave him time to get past.

Mme. Limiès was mistaken. Far from having taken the matter lightly, the marquis had been very much upset by it. He was the most authoritative of directors and the most conscientious of Christians. It had pained him to learn that a woman who professed to tell him everything had secrets from him, and at the same time he reproached himself with sinful neglect in not having talked to her more about Silvère. He also felt another kind of mortification; need we expect him to be a saint, and exempt from every human weakness? He knew the *comtesse* exacted from all her household the most strict observance of their religious duties: if she had made an exception in favour of her gardener, who lived with her, ate at her table, it must be because this gardener was very dear to her. He began to feel jealous. What she had tried in vain to prevent had happened; all her precautions had been rendered useless by an unexpected event which had upset all her calculations. Like avarice, jealousy hardens the heart: for the first time in his life, M. de Coulevreux did a hard thing.

Two hours later he entered Mme. de Rins's drawing-room, and said to her:

"They say, *ma chère comtesse*, you are as tolerant as pious. Like God Himself, true tolerance makes no account of persons. I fear yours is not the same for everybody, that it has two weights and measures, that it will not pass over in some what it allows to others. I know, and admire you for it, that you only take into your service members of the Catholic Church, and that you see to it that all your people attend church regularly. Now, there is in your house a young man who is not a servant, and whose example must have a good deal of weight with all

who surround you, a young man for whom you have affection and esteem . . . ."

He had put such bitterness into these last words that he even reproached himself. For a moment he stopped, then went on again.

"Not only M. Silvère Sauvagin never attends church, does not even confess and communicate at Easter; but I am told he is an avowed atheist; sometimes he says things which shock all believing people, who blame you for it."

She had grown pale—she felt a great misfortune had befallen her.

"Be sure they are doing him injustice," she replied hotly. "M. Sauvagin has too much self-respect to say at any time or place, anything he should not, and I should never have allowed him to do so in my house; you will not insult me by thinking I should."

"Certainly, I am quite willing to admit people have been unjust. But I ask you, does he perform his religious duties? And if he does not perform them, have you ever talked to him about it? Why is he only privileged to dispense with rules, and to behave in your house as he pleases? . . . . Do you not fear that people will be surprised and begin to imagine there is something between you?"

Her pallor now changed to a blush, and she looked away. Alas! he was right; there was something between Silvère and herself. A common passion, an idolatry in common had united them; flowers, flowers red, yellow, blue, carnation, violet or grey, had been the accomplices in this matter; her affection for him was a vague, confused sentiment, which she could not have defined, and which was a sin perhaps, but such a little one after all! And yet she would have died rather than confess it to the man who had her conscience in charge. And what was worse, she rather enjoyed thinking there was a hidden corner of her heart in which she reserved the right of keeping this pleasure to herself, that there was a portion of herself which belonged to her and no one else. She had sometimes told God about it, and it seemed to her that the God worshipped in Church

condemned her, but the God who created the plants and was pleased with His bushes and roses smiled on her innocent fault. In her retired, almost austere life, this was the one charming, flower-decked spot; and her tenderness for an unbeliever, whose unbelief never disturbed her, seemed to her not only excusable, but delightful. She had here her adventure, her romance; however serious she may be, what woman, truly a woman, can live without romance? But all this had passed in a deep, impenetrable darkness, and here came a man, armed with a torch, to turn his searching light into the mysterious recesses of her heart, which she only showed now and again to the God who pardons and forgives! However much she revered M. de Coulevreux, she felt he had been inconsiderate and cruel.

She did not answer his question.

"One should be indulgent," said she, "for the errors of a young man who deserves esteem for his irreproachable honesty, the uprightness of his character, his extreme honourableness. It seems to me impossible God will not one day claim him for his own. I thought the best thing was to be patient, wait and hope. Be sure that with time . . . ."

"I can believe," he interrupted, "that he possesses all the virtues the Comtesse de Rins attributes to him; but to tell you the truth, I care less about him than about you. Have you done your duty? Have you warned him?"

"Yes," she said.

"And he did not give way? Did you insist? . . . Did you return to the charge? . . . ."

She shook her head.

"It was he himself," he went on, raising his voice, "he himself, who praised you for being as tolerant as pious, and you must allow that in his mouth this praise is an accusation . . . . Are you satisfied with yourself? I put it to you. I leave it with your conscience. We live in troublous, trying times, when the duty of confessing publicly one's faith is a more imperious, more sacred duty than ever. The Master we serve has declared that whosoever is not for Him, is against Him."

She seemed so cast down that he was touched, and his voice grew less harsh.

"There are several sorts of unbelievers. Does your young man read Voltaire, Strauss, or Renan?"

"I don't think he has ever bothered himself about religious controversies, or that he has any taste for prohibited books."

"However unbelieving one may be, there is always something we believe in. What *does* he believe in then?"

"In the flowers," she replied, with a melancholy smile.

"Oh, well," he said, smiling too, "that's a faith that ought not to be very difficult to reconcile with ours: there is nothing to prevent a lover of flowers from believing in the God of the Christians. You yourself love them very much, and no one will ever suspect you of not being a good Christian. Is it not written in the Holy Book that the heavens and earth announce the glory of God, that from the cedar to the hyssop, everything tells of his wonderful works? . . . *I* am very fond of roses, *ma chère comtesse.*"

"He's boasting!" she thought: "he does not love them as we love them, and as they ask to be loved."

He was silent a moment, it seemed to him he had not yet sufficiently felt his way.

"Let us be indulgent and patient," he went on. "Don't give him any orders, till you have tried even what entreaty can do. Tell him he will be doing you a favour. You have been so good to him! I like to believe gratitude is one of his good qualities. Besides his own interest may be held a security for you; I am told he has nothing of his own, and must keep his situation. . . . Ask him to go with you to Mass every Sunday," he added, emphasising each word: "of course he will not refuse you this mark of deference and affection."

"You do not know him," she answered, shaking her head once more. "He worships flowers and his liberty."

"*His* heart is free," thought M. Coulevreux, "but I fear *hers* is not."

And he went on, frowning: "What you call liberty

seems to me an open revolt against the Divine Law. Say rather he is full of pride, and pride is never a virtue."

Then, with decision: "This proud heart must give in or go!"

She was utterly dismayed. Yes, misfortune had just come into her house. And what a misfortune, that very one she had always most feared, and had employed all her woman's diplomacy to avert and keep away. She recalled the happiness of the years that had vanished and would never return, all that Silvère had taught her, the first plant that, to help her, he had painted under her eyes, how he got ready her brushes and palettes, the long evenings they had spent together and which had seemed to her so short, the adorations they had in common, their talks which were always so serious and so full of a secret charm, the amusing hastinesses of this young master, who demanded promptitude in comprehending him, and the care he had always taken never to overstep his respect for her, and the impatience she had caused him by the slowness of her wits. The future frightened her. What a void! What a desert! Truly it was hard upon her. After so long distrusting him and herself as well, she had felt, without possibility of doubt, an increasing attraction for his personality, for his peculiarities, his reasons, his person, and sometimes the sound of his voice made her tremble. This woman, "*sans peur et sans reproche*," had had no thought of defending herself. She had reassured herself by saying: "I am fifty years of age, he is only thirty; this young man who supplies the wants of my intellect, and whose voice thrills my heart, might be my son." She loved him innocently, but she loved him enough to fear she might love him too much. Through him she had learnt to know at the same time the joys of a pure-minded attachment and of a secret feeling of wrong-doing . . . . Now she must give it all up. Yes, it was hard upon her. Had she then been so guilty? She was always rigid in her self-control, severe with herself, and continually on guard over her feelings, and he had guessed nothing. She remembered having read that an old nun who once re-

solved to give all her goods to the poor, had kept a little garden that she loved, and that getting grace at the very last she consented after long struggles to give up the key of her garden, which was the key of her heart. It seemed to her the nun's fate was less hard than her own, that there is less suffering involved in sacrificing one garden to God, than in sacrificing to Him one's gardener.

M. de Coulevreux respected her mournful reverie. After a long silence she roused herself, looked at him fixedly, and read on his delicately-featured face, which at this moment was both cold and severe in its beauty, that he had come to her house resolved to deal her this blow, that his decision was irrevocable, that he would grant her nothing, not even a respite.

"You wish it?" she asked, in the tone of the condemned speaking to his executioner.

"I wish it," he replied, in tones so firm and imperious that Mme. Limiès, if she had been present at this conference, would have doubted no longer the possibility of joining to a talent for insinuation, the power of commanding. "Don't be tragic about it," he went on. "If it's your humanity that makes you hate to dismiss M. Sauvagin, you can soften his disgrace by being generous to him. I will take charge of the rest: and I undertake at all costs to find you before two days have elapsed a skilled gardener, of exemplary character, who will have all the virtues this unbeliever has, and perhaps those he has not."

She knew his arm was long, that he was mixed up with many things, that his bare drawing-room, where more than one marriage had been arranged, served upon occasion as a registry office. Still his offer seemed such a mockery to her that she replied with a quiver in her voice:

"Please don't take the trouble. One of his subordinates is an intelligent workman, I will try to educate him."

The Christian was growing resigned, the woman avenged herself: "There are men," she said, "who cannot be replaced: only regretted."

He felt she was defying him, and filled with secret anger,

fixed on her his eagle eyes, which could pierce souls and overpower the will: she could not withstand their angry flash; but bowed humbly before it, and without saying a word, mutely implored forgiveness.

He rose with folded arms:

"Madame," he exclaimed, "God is less jealous of the idols to which we sacrifice in the light of day, than of those we worship in the hidden depths of our heart."

As he went out, the idol-breaker, satisfied with his victory, caught sight of the unconscious rival he had just got rid of in the distance. He was seized with an impulse of sincere pity:

"Poor boy!" he thought; "he has no idea of what is in store for him."

When, two hours later, Silvère and Mme. de Rins were dining tête-à-tête together, he was struck with her melancholy look, her long silences distressed him. He asked if she were not well: she answered neither yes nor no. He thought she had received some bad news; but he had not the least little idea that he could be in any way connected with her gloom. They went into the drawing-room for coffee, as they did every evening; but contrary to her usual custom she sat down in a low arm-chair near the fireplace, as far as possible from the lamp, whose light, screened by a pink shade, did not reach her face. Her unhappiness wished to be in shadow, and when she had a hard task to perform, she preferred that no one could see from her face what she was feeling. She wanted to get it over at once, say immediately what she had been condemned to say. Diplomacy, management, artifices of rhetoric, nothing could alter her inevitable destiny. She felt herself caught in a vice: what was the use of prolonging her torture?

"Monsieur Sauvagin," she suddenly said, "what would you say to me if I were to ask you henceforth to go with me every Sunday to Mass?"

He stood speechless; of all the things that might have happened, this was what he had least expected. As if he had wanted to make sure it was she who was speaking, and

to know what her face could tell him, he lifted for a moment the shade off the lamp; he saw the *comtesse* was deadly white, and that her teeth were set. Evidently it was a serious matter. Controlling his emotion:

"If you were to ask me, Madame, or, which in this case would be the same thing, if you were to order me to go to Mass every Sunday, I should reply you had waited for a very long time before making this request; that in addition, nothing of the kind had ever been stipulated between us; that so far you have respected my doubts as I have respected your religion. I think I have told you that I am not an unbeliever on principle, and that I have no animosity against the church and its dogmas. There are enigmas for which I have renounced the hope of finding a solution; we are surrounded by mysteries which I have had neither the leisure nor the inclination to enquire into, and I may add that of all the explanations of the universe that have been given, materialism has always seemed to me the most insufficient and the most foolish. We must be prepared for everything; it may happen that one day my rather vague beliefs, and natural religion will satisfy me no longer. If I should change, I shall not have to be shown my way by the Church, I shall take it of my own free will; I shall never accept my initiative from any one else in any matter of conscience, and I do not mean that anybody shall have the right to suspect me of attending church under constraint, or from hypocrisy, or from self-interest . . . . Indeed, Madame, your request more than surprises me, and I am tempted to believe you are acting on some one else's suggestion . . . . Yes, Madame, it was you who spoke, but I thought I recognised the voice of another."

Suddenly he had an inspiration, and exclaimed:

"I see what it is: there's an ugly little plot on hand. This afternoon I saw Mme. Limiès coming out of M. de Coulevreux's villa, and two hours later M. Coulevreux was here. The blow has come from La Figuière; M. Trayaz is avenging himself, and you are his instrument."

"Say rather his victim," she replied dully. This kind

word failed to touch him: for the moment he had a heart of stone.

"Ah, yes, they vowed to get me sent away from here, and the order for expulsion coming to you from a man whom you could refuse nothing . . . ."

"You know," she interrupted, "that you might stay with me all your life if you chose, and if you were less obstinate . . . ."

He interrupted in his turn:

"You are like my uncle," he said, with a forced laugh. "It's my fate: I am offered conditions I cannot accept, and when I refuse them, it's my unfortunate character that's at fault."

She was on the point of congratulating herself that he was hard and unjust: it seemed to her she would regret him less. But the suffering in his eyes touched her, and she turned away hers.

"You have promised?" he went on.

"I have promised."

"And you have appointed my successor?"

"You will have no successor."

"When do you wish me to go?"

"Do what you please, take your own time."

"I will go to-morrow."

And wishing her good-night he left her to go and shut himself up in his summer-house, where he spent the whole night in packing up his books, his clothes, his collections and albums.

Next morning she sent for him to settle his accounts with him. His sleepless night had not softened his temper and his wrath: he moved brusquely, his voice was haughty. She told him he had a right to some compensation: he stopped her at her first word, declaring he only wanted what was strictly due. She insisted; he retorted:

"Perhaps it's the Christian idea that injustice is atoned for by an alms, but it is not mine: I accept no one's alms, and I remember injustices."

She was grieved: "Please don't let us say good-bye like

this," she said. "Remember all the past, what you have been to me, what I have tried to be to you . . . ."

"In everything else, the proverb tells us to judge of things by their endings, and you will allow, Madame, that this is a bad ending."

Then he saw this woman, who never wept, in tears, and he felt he had been unjust; that she was more unhappy than himself; that she was suffering cruelly for her pious obedience, to refuse which would have seemed to her to put her soul in danger. Taking her two hands, the long pale hands he had taught the art of painting, he pressed his lips to them with deepest respect. A slight flush suffused her cheeks, she murmured:

"I am more generous than you, I accept your alms."

He gave her no reply, and after telling her he would send for his things before evening, left her. She went with him to the door, which opened on to the terrace. Motionless on the threshold, she watched him disappear. A few months before, in the Rockies, M. Trayaz had had a vision of his own youth in the person of a little squat gold-digger. Mme. de Rins watched hers, or the little that was still left to her, depart forever with an extraordinary young man, who worshipped flowers and his pride. She felt older by twenty long years. It was all over with her silent romance. A jealous God, who requires us to mortify ourselves, had burnt up everything, consumed everything in her heart, indignant that there should yet be in it a green corner where the birds still sang occasionally. Yet, before he opened the gate, Silvère turned round to give a last look at the garden which was no longer his. He saw that a tall-stemmed flower had broken away from its support and was drooping its head; he went back, knelt reverently before it, and tied it up again. Then he went forth, never to return.

"They are right," said Mme. de Rins, under her breath, thinking of a jealous God and the Marquis of Coulevreux, "they are right, I loved him too much."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE blow was as heavy as it had been unexpected, and it took Silvère several days to recover. When he had got over his first stunned sensation, he ascertained that spite of some big bruises, he had suffered no fractures. Economical, and as wise as the proverbial ant, he had managed during the last few years to put away several thousands of francs. He could take time to turn round, could even afford to wait a little, and engaged three small rooms on the fourth floor of a house in the Rue de Portalet for the next six months. While he was busy over settling himself there with all his belongings, he did much speculating and reasoning over this new turn of affairs.

"I ought not to complain," he said to himself. "I should have begun to rust, if I had stayed on much longer with Mme. de Rins; living in luxury, with no fears for the morrow, and everything assured, I was beginning to suffer from too much ease and comfort. My body was free, but my mind was in prison. My time was being stolen, I had to do a hundred things in no wise connected with botany. In the end I should have become a sort of agent, an honest Sucquier, if it is possible to use the two words together, and what is worse, as one can grow accustomed to anything, I should never have known how I had fallen. I have lost my pillow and my feather-bed; now I am condemned to a life of effort, anxiety and suffering. In turning me out of my humble paradise, my dear uncle, though he little suspects it, has done me a great service. He has roused all my ambition once more: I will prove to him that misfortune, which enervates the feeble, fortifies those who are truly courageous, and that despots wreaking their revenge don't always realise what they are doing . . . You are a dog that has been thrown into the water; swim, my boy!"

What was he to do? He decided without hesitation on the course that seemed to him the wisest, safest, and at the same time the most attractive; it was to go as soon as possi-

ble to Paris and confide his difficulties to M. Martigne, for he counted on his old friend's counsel and assistance to help him out of his troubles. They corresponded regularly, and only quite recently the eminent academician had had occasion to tell Silvère how highly he esteemed him, and express gratitude for a service he had rendered him. Having undertaken to write a botany manual for the École de Pharmacie, and being absorbed by more important work, he had contented himself with sketching an outline of the book, and sending this rough draught on to Silvère, begging him to look it over, and alter it if he thought necessary. Silvère had revised it altogether, added some entire chapters, and M. Martigne, after careful examination, wrote to him:

"Well done, my young friend! I have just sent our book to the printer's. The best and most original work in my manual is not mine: I shall say so in my preface."

Impatient as he was to breathe the air of Paris, Silvère had to put off his departure for some days. Mme. Verlaque and her daughter were away, at the time of his rupture with Mme. de Rins, on a week's visit to relations. He would have to give them an account of it all, and dreaded the performance. He knew perfectly well that after his sudden dismissal, he could not for a moment be looked on as an eligible son-in-law; but he felt certain of obtaining without much delay a situation at a salary capable of supporting a young married couple, who loved each other so dearly the hardest crust shared together would be delicious. He swore it on his honour, his will and his love. Would he succeed in making Mme. Verlaque share his proud confidence? She was not easy to deal with; he knew he would find her hard to convince.

"And above all," he thought, "I must be careful not to bring M. Trayaz's name into this affair, or anything I say about it. If she suspected it was he who had played me this black trick, that he is henceforth my mortal enemy, and I have nothing to hope from *him*, she would evict me without pity, and all would be at an end between us."

Towards the end of the week he was told that Mme. Verlaque would be back the next day by the midday train, and at two o'clock he was with her. He was spared the trouble of telling her his disgrace: bad news travels fast, and between the station and the door of her house she had met two persons eager to inform her that the Comtesse de Rins had fallen out with M. Sauvagin and sent him away.

"Well!" she cried, before he could get out a word, "you have been at your usual tricks again! I confess to you, frankly, though I flattered myself that by this I knew you, I never expected this second outbreak . . . . But tell me what you have been up to. Whatever have you been doing?"

He explained as well as he could. She rolled her eyes as if calling Heaven to witness what violence she was doing herself in listening to this absurd tale without twisting the narrator's neck.

"Would it have been such a fearful penance for you to go to Mass every Sunday? You are not only strange, absurd, odd; to put it mildly you are an Iroquois!"

He explained his motives, but she could not understand him.

"All I can pretend to understand," she said, "is that there are consciences over-ready to be shocked, and scruples which bring their man straight to the work house."

And yet, though she was dying to do so, she did not break with him. She was furious with him, his explanations and his behaviour seemed perfectly pitiable to her, but still he was in her eyes the nephew of an enormously rich uncle who persisted in caring for him very much, and in spite of consequently an excellent match. So she thought at least, and had she known M. Trayaz was at the bottom of all this mischief, she was shrewd enough to conclude that certain proceedings are compatible with certain sentiments, that this might be a case of whom he loveth he chasteneth.

"You might go on arguing till to-morrow," she told him, "but you would not convince me. Don't let us hear any

more about it, but do me the honour of telling me your plans for the future, for I like to think you have some."

He told her of his project, and this time she understood better, but was equally perplexed. She knew that Paris is a place where a man, if he has plenty of go, can secure many a good thing: she thought Silvère had go; but what was to be expected from a man who held his conscience an inestimable treasure and would not allow any one to meddle with it? He spoke to her of M. Martigne and his Manual of Botany: it was the part of his discourse that produced the most effect.

"Evidently," she thought, "he is a thoroughly scientific man, and has undeniable talent; but he will invest it at a rate of one per cent at the utmost. The Iroquois have a valuable faculty for working and selling at a loss. Happily, I am here to look after him."

"Heaven grant," she replied, "that your hopes are not mere fancies, and that M. Martigne has as warm and reliable a friendship for you as you imagine he has. But it is never well to build upon sand . . . . And you must be quick and get settled somehow. I believe you are really in love; you can imagine pretty well how your marriage will be put off from month to month until you have found some new post."

And she said in prose what Corneille has said in verse: "*Sors vainqueur d'un combat dont Chimène est le prix!*"

The minute he had gone, she tried her great remedy. A long letter to M. Trayaz. She told him of Silvère's ill-luck, his determination to go and seek his fortune in Paris, and of his reliance on M. Martigne's help. She confided to him her own painful anxiety. Could she give up her daughter to such a hot-headed young fellow, who was always in some difficulty, and of whose future she began to feel the gravest doubts? By a skilfully managed transition, she edged in a few words of her difficulties with the historic villa. As she had been unable to let it, she had made up her mind to sell at a loss: and had been offered a hundred thousand francs for it by a Russian; but at the moment of

completing the bargain, he had altered his mind, and she had lost this excellent opportunity. Then she returned to her first theme, to insinuate in a passage whose wording she considered more carefully than any other part of her letter, that there was in this world an omnipotent being, a magician who, by a stroke of his magic wand, could make living water flow from the most arid rock, convert deserts into green pastures, and the griefs of a mother into perfect felicity. She added a post-script: "Your poor little daughter, who tells me to send you her love, is very sad and unhappy: I cannot make up my mind whether I ought to advise her to think no more of a young man she loves so much that she only sees his very unusual merits, and forgets his dangerous faults."

She read her letter through once more, was delighted with it, and hastened to post it. The same evening, Silvère, who was going to start very early next morning, came to say good-bye. She went to the extremes of forbearance in allowing him five minutes' conversation with her daughter alone.

"Can you truly and honestly," he asked Ameline, "say you still care a little for the Iroquois?"

She gave him her invariable answer:

"I told you I love peace, and you quarrel with every one."

"Ah, no, you are making a mistake: it's everybody else quarrelling with me just now. But what does it matter? Happiness, my real happiness, means you, and if only you will be faithful to me, I am ready to maintain that everything is for the best in the best possible of worlds, and that even rogues are worthy men."

He said it with so much passion even her indolence was affected by his words.

"It costs you then so much to go to church? You know you'll have to go, to get married to me."

"I'll go for that, most willingly. I can't bear to do anything under constraint; but when love is concerned, I could do anything, nothing is hard for me, and obedience is sweet."

"Not always. If you had kept your promise to me, you would not now be at war with your uncle."

"Let us forget the past," he exclaimed, "and think only of the future. What need have I of my uncle and his millions? I have will, I have legs and arms, I belong to the race of the ambitious and strong-willed; I will succeed, I swear to you, and win you a lot worthy of you . . . . But do you know what a woman must do to double a man's powers for him? She sits down with head bent down to him and eyes fixed on his, and tells him softly, oh so softly: 'Iroquois, I love you, and will love you always!"

The lymphatic, passive girl of the South, with her long drawn, sleepy speech, ended at last by warming up to the game. Whatever else he might be, Silvère was, after all, the man she liked best of all men; for if others admired her, and told her so, he was the only one who had spoken to her of love, and when he spoke, it was with a music that went to her heart; as she was not ungrateful by nature, there were times when this flute-player who gave her such unknown sensations, made her love him as passionately, as tenderly as it was possible for her to love anything. She did his bidding; sat down and with head bent down to him looked at him fixedly.

"You love the madman?" he said.

"Yes."

"And will love him all his life?"

"All his life."

In his delight, he was just about to seal by another kiss their treaty of peace and eternal alliance; but Mme. Verlaque suddenly reappeared, and there could be no question of kissing in her presence: she knocked the cup from his lips. Some minutes later they were saying good-bye, and as Mme. Verlaque took him down to the door she told him she should want to hear from him often, but at the same time gave him to understand he must accept her as his letter-box; if he had any very special message for Ameline, she would undertake to deliver it faithfully. He did not particularly relish this arrangement, but was in a mood when it

seemed hardly possible to him to complain of anything, when one swallows the fly with the honey it is drowned in. When he awoke on the morrow he fancied he could hear a soft, sweet voice murmuring in his ear: "For all your life! for all your life!"

Mme. Verlaque passed the next few days in extreme anxiety. In her impatience to hear from M. Trayaz, the postal delivery and the postman were her one waking thought. She was beginning to lose hope when one morning there came to visit her a stout, red-faced man, with whom she was already acquainted. M. Trayaz, who did not care for writing, had sent her his agent. M. Sucquier wore a tall grey hat, a coat of very fine cloth, a white waist-coat, and a sky blue necktie; in his buttonhole was a flower, but he looked all the uglier for this decoration. Still the sight of his pimply face overjoyed Mme. Verlaque. The interview began on his part with an air of much gravity and mystery; after he had seated himself in an arm-chair, whose springs he made all creak at once; after he had opened his silver snuff-box, taken a pinch, coughed, breathed hard, and beaten the bush to exasperate her impatience, he came to the point at last, and said, in the familiar tone he used to everyone, except the powerful man who employed him:

"I am bringing you some news, Madame, which will not fail to please you. You told M. Trayaz you were anxious to sell your house: he would not be sorry to have a small place in Hyères; so he gave me orders to examine your villa: on my report he has decided to buy it, and has told me to inform you that, in consideration of your position and the interest you derive from the property, he offers you two hundred thousand francs for it, payable on the appointed day, and in any shape the present owner prefers."

Mme. Verlaque's heart dilated. But as she never cared to express gratitude, she ventured to say that on these conditions she would be selling her house at cost price. She got nothing by this but a setting down.

"I don't know what it cost," M. Sucquier told her in his

most caustic tone, "but I know that in its present state, I wouldn't give sixty thousand francs for it."

She speedily beat a retreat, praised M. Trayaz for his generosity, and declared that there are friendships it is impossible to prize too highly.

"We are agreed, then, *chère madame.* Only . . ."

"Ah, yes," she said smiling, "I thought M. Trayaz never did anything for nothing."

"You are a clever woman, and are quite right in your conjecture. What M. Trayaz wants from you is that in everything that concerns your daughter's marriage, you will transfer your rights over her to him, that you will formally give her up to him . . . . I have astonished you, *chère madame?*"

"More than I can say, *cher monsieur!*"

"Believe me there is no need to be alarmed, and we are doing it all for your good. Although he is very much displeased with his nephew, M. Trayaz persists in taking a great interest in him. Why is he so foolish about this boy? It's an old man's whim I can't undertake to explain."

At these words he rubbed his cheek as if to get rid of the traces of a blow that still lingered there.

"In short," he went on, "this most good-natured uncle is ready to be reconciled to his nephew, but on condition that the ungrateful fellow will humble himself to him. Would it not be a splendid way of taming him, to get from you the right to dispose of your daughter's hand, and thus be able to say to this hare-brained youth: 'I will give her to the man that pleases me best: do your best to please me!' Besides this, you will understand, Madame, what advantages will result to you from this strange caprice. M. Trayaz becomes to a certain extent responsible for Mlle. Verlaque's future. If he gives her to his nephew, you may be sure he will give her a *dot;* if he refuse her to him, he will feel bound to find another husband for her, and the *dot* will be larger still."

There was no need of explaining to her what would be the advantages of this combination, which seemed to her

most promising, and she declared that without taking time to think over the matter, she would agree at once willingly to the arrangement proposed to her.

"That's right," pursued M. Sucquier. "Only . . ."

"Another only?" she interrupted again. "This time I begin to feel anxious."

"M. Trayaz wishes, *chère madame*, that until M. Sauvagin's return, your daughter should go and live as a hostage at La Figuière, and I swear to you she will be treated like a queen there."

"I believe you," answered Mme. Verlaque, who had suddenly grown thoughtful; "but if I authorise M. Trayaz to do what he will with my daughter's hand, what difference does it make to him if she lives with him or with me?"

"Ah! you do not know him yet. He is a man of active imagination, who is bored and wants to find a cure for his boredom. What would you have? he has a love for visible signs, for the symbols which speak to the eyes, and even a taste for theatrical effect. On his return from Paris, M. Sauvagin rushes to your house . . . . 'Where is she then?' And you tell him, 'You need not look for her here, you would never find her; your uncle has carried her off from me; you must demand her from him.' What a blow for him! What will he not imagine? M. Trayaz sees him already frantically making for La Figuière, and throwing himself at his feet. Though my lord and master is not especially learned in matters historical, he has probably heard of Pope Gregory VII and a certain German emperor who had to perform an *amende honorable* at Canossa. I don't suppose he will require M. Sauvagin to spend a night in the snow in his shirt; there is not often any snow in the Var in the month of April. But he'll devise something for him; when one is bored, one must have amusement, get rid of the fog somehow . . . . Don't spoil his little pleasures!"

She grew more and more thoughtful, and objections occurred one after another to her mind.

"Monsieur Sucquier," she said, "I am very anxious to sell my house, but I am much more anxious about my daughter's reputation. She is the first of my affections . . . ."

"And, between ourselves," he insinuated, "we sometimes do business with our affections."

She took no notice of his impertinent remark, but went on drily:

"I confess to you that, to send her alone like this into a strange house . . . . If I were with her it would be a different thing . . . ."

"It would be quite a different thing, madame. Whatever pleasure M. Trayaz might find in your society, the little scene he is preparing would lose its flavour, and he would resent your distrust. Why, you seem to think you are sending Mlle. Ameline to a bachelor's house, that she will have no other companionship than that of an old bachelor. You are quite mistaken, madame, as you will see. She will find all M. Trayaz's relations there, among whom, if I am any judge of things, are three ladies of the very best society, and a very charming young girl, Mlle. Huguette Lejail. She will enjoy herself: there are all kinds of gay doings this year at La Figuière. M. Trayaz has grown wonderfully young again since his last voyage to America. Once or twice every week we have big dinners, acting, concerts, charades, tableaux-vivants, all kinds of things. Your daughter's life hitherto has been sober enough: let her have her fling, and, be assured, she will be as much respected as cared for. I was forgetting to tell you that M. Trayaz, who, since his rejuvenescence, has generally introduced some bit of childishness into everything he undertakes, wants to arrange a surprise for his guests, a little *fête* in which the principle rôle will be given to the most lovely girl in Provence . . . In fact, he is very much bent on this! as a friend I advise you to think twice before disappointing him."

When the owner of a priceless picture is asked to send it to an exhibition, he is divided between his desire of showing it to the world, and so covering himself with

glory, and his fear that this chef d'œuvre, which is worth a fortune, may be returned into his hand, deteriorated, spoiled by some irreparable injury. Mme. Verlaque experienced the same perplexity; for some moments she was silent, then:

"M. Sucquier, may I speak to you with perfect confidence?"

"Why, certainly, *chère madame.* I flatter myself I am a good judge of faces, and the very first time I saw you it seemed to me that you and I were made to understand each other. I have proved this to you by explaining everything to you as I have done, with a freedom of speech and an absolute frankness I don't allow myself with everybody."

"*Cher monsieur*, if I must confess all, I fear M. Trayaz may admire my daughter too much."

"And you conclude that he may be tempted to take her himself."

In his turn he paused, and rolling his snuff-box between his fingers, seemed to hesitate about going further. He decided at last to risk everything.

"I was charged with a message to you, and so far you have had to deal with the ambassador from M. Trayaz. Now, madame, M. Sucquier is speaking for himself, in his own name; do him the honour of listening to him. Everything is possible. Mon Dieu! yes, it might happen that M. Trayaz, who grows younger every day, may fall head over ears in love with your daughter! . . . . What a terrible thing if she should marry *him* and his millions!"

Mme. Verlaque felt as if the world was turning round her. She was so agitated that M. Sucquier seemed to be a great distance off and looked a mere speck to her; he only gradually resumed his proper dimensions. As soon as she had recovered from her violent emotion:

"Ah!" said she, "there are happinesses so perfect we dare not wish for them. But, as you say, everything is possible. Might there not also happen . . . .?"

"No," he interrupted peremptorily, "you are needlessly alarming yourself. If ever M. Trayaz should pay your

daughter attention, it will be in the most straightforward way. Believe me, with the exception of M. Sauvagin, whom we shall not have much difficulty in ousting, since he is bent on doing it for himself, my august patron is very little disposed to make happy his heirs presumptive, whom he suspects of waiting impatiently for his death. Well preserved as he is, if his heart were touched, I should not be surprised if he played them the trick of getting married before their very eyes, and presenting them with a rosy, fresh little heir of his own. Would you object ?"

She was seized with a fresh attack of giddiness and passed her handkerchief over her moist brow. Compared to this vision she was feasting on, all those she had hitherto cherished seemed to her as nothing; she saw in her own mind an immense cask hooped with gold, that a little plump woman, who strongly resembled herself, had just been broaching; she drew and drew, and the cask never grew empty.

"Let us see where we are," pursued M. Sucquier, pulling himself up in his arm-chair. "I assure you and declare to you that at present M. Trayaz has only the most fatherly feelings for your daughter, an old man's friendship for a girl; and that his idea is to give her to his nephew. My idea, of which I will not breathe a word to her is, that if Mlle. Ameline knows how to go to work . . . . Is she clever ? has she tact, skill ?"

"Unhappily she doesn't know the meaning of the words."

"Is she manageable, at least ?"

"It's her principal characteristic."

"Well, if I have been so happy as to gain your confidence, tell her, command her to be entirely governed by my advice . . . . You rely, I hope, on my experience and good faith ?"

"Can you doubt it ?" she said. "If what we want should happen, if the uncle were to substitute himself for the nephew, you would be thoroughly avenged for the insult offered you by his impertinence."

"Believe me, madame," he said, in his most hypocritical

voice, "I do not bear malice, and never invoke the god of vengeance in my prayers. . . . If your utmost wishes should be fulfilled—*mon Dieu!* there is no harm in a man's thinking of himself—I dare hope that he who has borne the burden and heat of the day will have his share of honours, and that beyond the great pleasure it is to me to serve you, you will . . . ."

She spared him the embarrassment of finishing. "Monsieur Sucquier, we are not ungrateful, my daughter and I."

He slightly shrugged his shoulders, looked incredulous.

"Besides," she added, "our interests will answer to you for us; we will undertake to do anything you wish. Do you not hold our fates in your hands?"

She had touched the right chord: he smiled pleasantly. "I have always," he said, "loved the naked truth, bare and unadorned."

Then, rising: "We have been losing our way in the Seventh Heaven; let us come back to earth, if you please. In a few days M. Trayaz will send you a maid who is to wait on your daughter altogether and to fetch her to La Figuière."

She bowed her acquiescence and twice shook the hand Silvère had refused to touch. The rest of the day she spent in a kind of intoxication. Her whole body was tingling with joy; her head felt too small to contain her hopes, and like a tree that is weighed down by the abundance of its fruit, she could hardly bear the burden of her happiness and her dreams.

She only vouchsafed the briefest explanations to her daughter, telling her M. Trayaz felt a great affection for her, and wanted to have "his charming daughter" under his own roof for some time, and that there are invitations it is impossible to refuse. Ameline grew pale with fright: Mme. Verlaque told her her future was at stake, and she would enjoy herself very much at La Figuière. She added that M. Sucquier was a worthy and excellent man, who delighted to watch over young girls and help them when they were in difficulties.

The next day she sent for the best milliner and most skilful dressmaker in Hyères, and set to work to procure her daughter a suitable outfit. She gave her a gold medallion, and a pearl bracelet she had saved from her own shipwreck. On the day arranged, Virginie—that was the name of the maid M. Trayaz had engaged for Ameline—came to fetch her. Mme. Verlaque went with her to the railway station, and advised her once again to take M. Sucquier for her confidant and counsellor. This advice, administered in the most solemn tone, surprised Ameline very much. She was not in the secrets of the divine powers; and had no idea what mighty hopes were founded on her beauty.

Her heart was full, and long after her mother was out of sight, she continued to gaze in the direction in which she had disappeared. She had been told, and told repeatedly, that M. Sucquier was the most reliable of confidants. She would have to confide in him then, and ask his advice? All this alarmed her very much. La Figuière seemed to her a terrible place, where she would have problems to solve, decisions to make, where sphinxes would ask innocent young girls riddles, to which they could find no answer. And her mother would not be there, this mother who knew everything and in whose eyes she read what she was to do.

Happily, though she was easily frightened, it was not difficult to reassure her: with the least little authority over her, it was simple enough to agitate or calm her. Virginie was a very coaxing person, and soon won upon her enough with her insinuating ways to persuade her she was doing wrong in making herself unhappy with these needless alarms, that there was nothing to be afraid of at La Figuière, which she would find a very comfortable house, where every one would try to make her happy and at home. She learnt from this civil, obliging girl who never stopped talking, but always said something worth listening to, what a big entertainment M. Trayaz was giving that very evening, and what was the rôle he meant her to play in it. The rôle was one she liked. She had no talent for conversation; but

birds love to sing: and singing was her natural language. M. Trayaz, who always knew everything there was to be known, was not ignorant of her nightingale voice, and counted on this virtuosa to adorn an interlude with which he hoped to delight his guests. Virginie told her also that he was very anxious no one should know of her arrival, and what precautions he had taken to ensure her being brought into the house at night, and with the greatest mystery.

It was an amazing novelty in her life: nothing like it had ever happened to her. This little plot, whose object she could not possibly guess, after at first alarming ended by amusing her. She was very submissive by nature, and resolved to take everything in good part, ending at last by convincing herself that La Figuière was no domain of terrors, but that she could live there in peace, and that, thanks to the devoted friendship and good advice of a maid who had completely won her confidence, she would avoid the mischances, false steps, dangerous encounters, and harsh looks she had feared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE agent had spoken truly; the old pear-tree that had been thought dead had suddenly grown green again. At intervals, on certain days, M. Trayaz was another man. He felt it himself, and attributed the honour of the change to the pair of twins, who had delighted him, and with whom he had had such good talks, and still more to the recalcitrant nephew he was promising himself to reduce to obedience. If his withered face had grown brighter, his gloomy, cold eyes more genial, still his heart was no tenderer. To the more important reasons he had assigned for wanting Mlle. Ameline Verlaque to come to him was added another that M. Sucquier had not mentioned: he loved to harass his family. He was preparing a disagreeable surprise for it in the month of May, in the person of three American ladies

he was expecting to visit him; but he did not mean to wait till then for an opportunity of tormenting them with painful emotions. He had a more remarkable talent than any one else in the world for keeping his family on the rack.

There was always at La Figuière some favourite or other. For some time now it had been Mlle. Huguette who had held the first place in the master's good graces; there was no question any longer of competition, she triumphed, reigned, throned it over them all. She had only to wish, everything was granted at once. Her great-uncle seemed to have opened an unlimited account for all her whims: chiffons, jewels, he showered presents upon her; gave her authority to order as she pleased all the entertainments and festivities in his house, to take command of everything, even reprimand his servants, who were absolutely obedient to her. Sam himself, Sam the privileged, announced one fine day in the servants' room, that this pretty and artful little lady was a witch, that she did what she liked with the old man, and that they would soon see something that would astonish them, something extraordinary, phenomenal, stupendous. When they begged him to explain himself, he replied:

"Not a word! I know what I'm saying, though!"

If Sam was astonished by this prodigious good luck, others were indignant over it. It cost Mme. de la Farlède appetite and sleep, and she grew visibly yellow. She carried her complaints to her mother, accusing her sister of having broken faith. Mme. Lejail answered with bitterness; Mme. Limiès tried in vain to soften things down, for a week they were not on speaking terms. Casimir was neither indignant nor astonished, but he only half liked it. He complained several times that his queen, whose head had been quite turned, was neglecting him, or treating him with arrogance. Still, on her good days she tried to console him for her forgetfulness and haughtiness. She was under the same obligations to him as an actress is to the author who creates her a part.

Had he not helped her to win M. Trayaz's heart by composing charades and plays which had furnished her with an

opportunity for displaying her rare talents, her chance of shining so brilliantly, and gaining universal acclaim? To atone for her ill-treatment of him, she went for long tandem rides with her poet, happy to show herself off to her uncle in the bicycling costume he had got for her from Paris, to make him admire her jacket, flannel chemisette, artistic collar, black satin tie, and zouave knickerbockers with their big, wide folds, tied round the waist by a sash, and falling over her calves in a puff. She wore marvellous corsets, which yielded to every movement, but there was no sign of them visible. The two break-neck riders went for wild rides together, tearing down the steepest hill-sides, and occasionally rolling into a ditch. Those were accidents which delighted Casimir infinitely. She reproached him with trying to bring them about, and of making the most of them, and made this the pretext for having nothing to do with him for a few days, after which she received him back into favour.

This pretty young lady, who had just passed her eighteenth birthday, deserved her good luck, but she erred by a natural intemperance in her use of it; she was not satisfied with using, but abused. She took it for granted that if her uncle had been so long a time before doing her justice, henceforth he would be devoted to her, and allowed herself to be so familiar with him, that when she had anything to request, from her tone it might have been inferred she was giving orders. He made no objection, let her go her way, and seemed to enjoy feeling the bit in his mouth.

Since they had been living at La Figuière under a régime of tolerance, and it had been made allowable to wear a velvet cap, keep relays of overcoats, and only taste those dishes suited to delicate stomachs, M. Lejail complained less. One day, exalted by her triumph, Huguette said to him:

"I am taming him, I have got him quite in hand and am breaking him in. It's at my orders now that we have fair weather or foul here."

"Take care," he replied. "I only believe in his good

intentions when he is content to be moderately amiable. When this delightful old man, as you call him, becomes as sweet as honey, you may be sure he has got something or other in his head for annoying someone."

"Mamma often tells you you are afraid of your own shadow."

"Take warning by the experience of others. What has become of the two constellations that shone here for a little time with such radiance? We have seen them grow pale, wane, and set."

"My two cousins were such fools."

And she whispered in his ear:

"Leave me to go my own way, and we will share with no one."

He humbly took off his cap to her.

"You are a charming, ambitious girl," said he, "and I know what you are thinking. Your motto is Fouquet's, a squirrel with these words: 'Quo non ascendam?—Whither shall I not climb?' Louis XIV had the motto explained to him, and Fouquet was a ruined man. You'll get a fall! Happily you are as agile as a cat, you'll soon be up again and off faster than before."

She made a bet with her uncle and won. When he asked her how he was to pay his debt, she told him they had given dinners at La Figuière, soirées, and plays, but never a ball or a supper. So it was settled that a fortnight later they would give a ball, and she was charged to arrange everything, to order everything her own way, with full powers, carte blanche in every matter. For two weeks she was occupied from morning to night with the preparations for her fête, which she meant to be a memorable one. The decorations within and without, the music, the supper, she meant everything to be perfect, and far surpassing the expectations of the public. It is easy to do things well when one has unlimited credit: but that is not all that is required, one must have ingenuity, much application, and be ready to descend to the minutest details. She had a good head, and forgot nothing, though she sent her orders to Toulon, Mar-

seilles, even to Paris. As grave as a politician meditating some great enterprise, and on whom rests a vast burden of responsibility, she gave herself all sorts of airs. She only half listened to what was said, so that people had to repeat themselves for her benefit; and at the same time, decided everything by herself, shut up promptly any one who was impertinent enough to make suggestions, kept the inquisitive at a distance, and scorned the murmurs of the jealous.

Mme. de la Farlède, who was at boiling point, ventured to hint one day to M. Trayaz that Huguette fancied herself the lady of La Figuière, and behaved as though she were its owner. He replied sharply:

"Leave her alone: she's a very clever girl, is Huguette! Besides, why should you interfere? It's her ball."

She withdrew in despair.

Huguette consulted no one about her list of invitations. In a short time they had made many friends: such is the powerful attraction of gold. The friends from Lyons had become habitués of the house, and to them had been added their friends, their friends' friends, and by degrees all the owners of villas in the neighbourhood, among whom were a well-known writer and a celebrated artist. Everybody was anxious to visit the lion at home and try his cuisine. Nothing was talked of but the perfect good taste of his unostentatious luxury, of the viands he offered his guests, which were just as delicate and refined as they were succulent, of the exquisite bouquet of his wines, of the magnificence of his solid, massive plate. The celebrated artist, who passed for the most refined of gourmands, had declared that La Figuière was the only place he knew where the dishes were solid silver, and the table left nothing to be desired. There are boxes worth more than their contents: at La Figuière the contents surpassed infinitely the box; and snug and commodious as it was, whoever came for the first time into this *bourgeois* house, where no kind of display was allowed, was astonished at the splendid and royal hospitality he received there. No one knew it had been built by a churl who had vowed to live alone, and who had grown

sociable from necessity, from his urgent desire not to perish of ennui.

Although her grandmother timidly remonstrated with her about doing so, Huguette's invitation cards ran: "M. Christophe Trayaz and Mlle. Huguette Lejail, At Home, Monday, the 10th of April, 10 P. M. Dancing." She meant to send one to a young Englishman, a Mr. Hornsby, and Casimir had a deadly quarrel with her in consequence. For some days he had been complaining to himself that the ungrateful girl took no notice of him at all; he was only waiting for an excuse to give vent to his feelings, and Mr. Hornsby was the last straw. He was the younger son of a great English family, had been very ill, and had been sent to the south to complete his recovery: he had promptly completed it, and when he was not rowing, was always in the saddle, riding all over the mountains. Huguette had met him at the house of some neighbours, and he had been very attentive to her. From that day she had not ceased praising him to Casimir, extolling most provokingly the beauties of his face and form, his splendid carriage, rare merits, and the graces of his mind; she pronounced him the most accomplished young man she had ever known. She made so much of him, Casimir grew to hate the insular youth.

One morning, finding himself alone with her:

"Your grandmother," he said, "has just told me something so extraordinary I refuse to believe it."

"What was the incredible thing she told you?"

"She says you are going to invite Mr. Hornsby to your ball. I am sure you will not do anything so unbecoming."

"Why do you think it would be so unbecoming?"

"Mr. Hornsby has not been introduced to my uncle, and you hardly know him at all."

"I know him enough to know he is charming."

"You are going out of the way to get snubbed. Englishmen do not accept invitations to houses where they have not been introduced."

"When Englishmen are travelling on the continent, they

are not so much slaves of etiquette, and always accept invitations if their givers are liked by them."

"I tell you he'll refuse."

"I tell you he'll come, and I count on his coming more than I can say. I am told he is an admirable waltzer, and I am reckoning on him to lead the cotillon with me."

This was too much, and in his rage he risked everything on one throw, which was a mistake.

"You must choose between him and me," he said. "If Mr. Hornsby comes to your ball, I shall not."

"Just as you please, we are all free agents."

A few days later, Mr. Hornsby having written to Mlle. Huguette Lejail that he had much pleasure in accepting her kind invitation, Casimir pretended that urgent business called him to Aix, and left without any attempt on the part of Mlle. Lejail to detain him. Her great prosperity was making her inhuman.

On the evening of the 10th of April, by nine o'clock, she was under arms. Her dress, a mingling of white tulle and of satin, had come from one of the greatest dressmakers in Paris, and a workwoman from the establishment had been sent to try it on: the left side of the bodice fell in soft folds, the puff of the sleeves started from under an epaulette of flowers. Her hair, which was dressed high and very simply, was only adorned with a tiny spray of barbel flowers, whose clear blue set off to perfection the exquisite fairness of her locks. She went downstairs to make sure all her orders had been properly carried out: investigated drawing-rooms, dining-room, the illuminated garden, surveying everything with the eye of the master. She reviewed the orchestra which she had sent for from Marseilles and got together most carefully: piano, violins, violoncellos, wind instruments, all her musicians were specially selected. She meant M. Trayaz's toilette to be irreproachable; inspected with severe scrutiny his dress coat, waist-coat, and gloves; convinced him that his man had tied his white bow carelessly, and did it for him again herself.

By ten o'clock people were beginning to arrive. The

guests were received at the door of the first drawing-room by a rejuvenated sexagenarian, and a pretty girl of eighteen who looked as though she was at home and doing the honours of her own house. Some of the newest arrivals in the neighbourhood were quite taken in by her; one of them called her "madame," to her great delight. Mr. Hornsby supposed that if she were not engaged already, she would be before long, that this ball was for the purpose of announcing her engagement, and experienced the indefinable melancholy inspired always in a young man by the good fortune of an old one, for which the young man always consoles himself by wishing his ill-gotten gains may not prosper. Again and again Mme. Lejail was almost overcome by the warmth of her motherly feelings; she trembled with pride and joy; the ex-préfet found his daughter amazing and began to doubt his own doubts; Mme. de la Farlède in her bitterness had no longer the strength to conceal her mortification, and Sam, nudging the *maître d'hôtel*, whispered in his ear:

"Didn't I tell you so?"

The whole evening through she was radiant, never a cloud came between her and her sun. It was not only that she was very pretty, and danced extremely well, but she felt she was being admired, all eyes told her so. She was the centre of everything, of all the attentions. Without sacrificing her duties to her pleasures, she would sometimes escape from her admirers to take a look into the room where some of the guests were playing at cards, or into the library, which was converted into a smoking room. She said to the players: "Are you having a good game? I want every one to have a good time to-night."—And to the smokers: "You won't mind having this window open? I allow you to smoke, but not to smoke each other out." She scolded the indolent who stood about in doorways to talk horses and bicycling: "Don't you see those pretty girls who are wallflowers over there? I want every one to dance." And from time to time, she would give a word to the servants who were looking after the refreshments: "Remember my

orders; I mean everything to be done just as I told you." As she had told Casimir, she led the cotillon with Mr. Hornsby, who had discovered his mistake, and was calculating in his head what this millionaire's niece would bring her husband. The cotillon which was very lively, and was enriched by a figure of her own invention, came to an end between two and three. The gifts, chosen by herself, were both original and magnificent. They furnished the celebrated artist with the remark that if La Figuière was the only house where excellent food was served up on solid silver, it was also an extraordinary house where not the least marvel was, that everything that glittered there was gold.

Dancing was over, and they were going out to supper, Huguette took Mr. Hornsby's arm, and leading the way, had started for the dining-room, when M. Trayaz stopped her short.

"Huguette," he said, "what's the meaning of this?"

And he pointed with his finger to a young girl who, from some mysterious hiding place, had just mounted the platform of the musicians, who were busily refreshing themselves. The appearance of the unknown fair one was a *coup de théâtre:* men and women turned round to look and in a moment all eyes were upon her. Her head with its wealth of waving hair was shrouded in a lace mantilla that accentuated the pure outline of her face, and was caught up by a big flower of yellow purslain she wore over her left ear. Her black silk dress had suggestions of pale pink on its bodice, and the edge of its skirt. Her slippers, which were of reddish brown morocco were tied with scarlet bows. In one hand she held a plumy fan, in the other her music. The curiosity and admiration she excited caused her no appearance of pride. She seemed to be saying to all the eyes that were devouring her:

"If I please you, it is *le bon Dieu* to whom I owe it: He made me—I had nothing to do with it."

"Well! What do you think of her?" said M. Trayas to his grand-niece.

She was clever enough to know at once from his accent and his smile, that this was one of his favourite tricks he was playing her, that the thing had been carefully planned, and might have serious consequences, that the fair unknown was a dangerous rival, that her crown was tottering on her brow, that her glory was departed, and everything was over for her.

M. Trayaz went up to the leader of the band, and asked him in rather annoyed tones who had taken the liberty of bringing in this young girl, and what she wanted there. The man replied she was a young Andalusian who had fled from her father's house, because her people were trying to force her into a marriage with a man she did not love, that she had a very pretty voice, and earned her daily bread by singing in the streets, and sometimes in people's houses. Then turning to her he said that she had annoyed M. Trayaz by coming into his rooms without leave, but that certainly her audacity would be forgiven as soon as her voice was heard. He told her to sing one of her own native songs, and offered to accompany her. For sole reply, she gave him her sheet of music, and he sat down to accompany her at the piano.

Before attacking her first note, it was quite evident she went through a moment of painful nervousness, and her fan was seen shaking in her hand. But as soon as she began to sing, she regained perfect self-possession. She had been trained in a good school: her method, as well as her delivery, did honour to her masters. Her voice was of extensive compass and very beautiful in tone; full, soft, limpid, it seemed to wrap its hearers round with melody and came forth with as little effort as the song of a bird. She was a wonderful artist, but not of the kind to express the ardour and storms of a great passion: she was rather an angel of peace, whose music was caressing to the ear, cradling into slumber heart and senses, speaking to them of tranquil joys which never weary, of sorrows which are sometimes sweet, of a balm which heals all wounds, of a world where good and evil are never at strife, where pleasures are happiness

without intoxication, where innocent souls feast upon pure, indefinable delights which like exquisite wines are clear and good down to the dregs, and are followed by no repentance.

Every one felt the charm of her song, and when it came to an end, applauded rapturously. Mme. de la Farlède said, loud enough to be heard by her niece:

"That's what I call singing: how it soothes one after a voice as harsh as a crow's."

At that moment the well-known writer was saying to the celebrated painter:

"If ever she gets an engagement at the Opéra-Comique, Paris will go mad over her. The child has a fortune in her throat."

"And not only in her throat," replied the artist, with an admiring look at the folds and curves of the black silk gown. And they each promised themselves to lose no time in getting better acquainted with her.

On all sides a repetition of her song was being asked for, demanded even. The well-known writer had been mistaken: she had not the nature of an operatic star. It had cost her much to appear before such a numerous public, and before entering upon such a trial, she had had to pray for God's help to support her. Now she had come to an end of her courage: M. Trayaz came to the rescue.

"Leave her alone," he said; "this little street singer has well earned her right to be here, and I think she has done all we could ask."

And then, to the great astonishment of all present, he went up to her, politely gave her his arm, and took her in to supper.

Mr. Hornsby was amazed: he found this a very strange, not to say shocking, way of behaving.

"Do you really think," he asked Huguette, "that your uncle means her to come and take supper with us?"

"Don't you see he is hoaxing us," she replied, "and that she has never sung in the street? I would give a good deal to know who she is."

Casimir, who could have told her so much, was at Aix, and the friends from Hyères who had been invited to her ball, had already left: so there was no one who could enlighten her. Her sumptuous supper seemed to her mournful and funereal, and she could not have told what was the flavour of the monumental *bouillabaisse* she had ordered from the Marseilles Réserve, where they were supposed to surpass even those of Lavandon. She had been queen of the ball, she was mistress of the house, and in consequence of her position was sitting opposite her uncle; but she felt that though she still kept the title, she was no longer queen regnant, that all eyes were turned to her smiling rival, whom M. Trayaz had placed at his right hand, while they were talking softly together. At times she felt that the worshippers of this new star were mocking at her disgrace, that she was being laughed at all round, that Mme. de la Farlède was looking at her exultingly, and that even her father was sneering. It was perfectly obvious too, that Mr. Hornsby's attention was elsewhere, and that he was answering her questions at random. By way of being agreeable to her he said:

"Oh, mademoiselle, how quick-sighted you are! You were certainly right, she is no street singer. Just look at her hands: I've never seen anything more perfect."

The dethroned queen protested against her deposition: she appealed against it, tried at intervals to recall her subjects to their duty, to proclaim her existence and her rights. Once or twice she addressed M. Trayaz across the table, either to ask him for something, or to complain of the slowness of the servants, for time seemed to her to hang more than heavily: she would have liked to cut short this lugubrious supper and the mortal pangs she was enduring. M. Trayaz turned a deaf ear to her; he seemed entirely taken up with his neighbour, first teasing and then consoling her. Huguette felt she was conquered, dispossessed, annihilated. Her pride, in its distress, was telling her: "Our good time is over, our hour is past." She compared herself to a shipwrecked mariner trying vainly to crest the waves, and con-

tinually washed back by the breakers: he gives in, sinks down, and all is over.

At last supper was finished. The fair unknown was lost to sight in the crowd and vanished. Huguette managed to get hold of M. Trayaz, and said to him in an abrupt voice:

"Won't you be kind, *mon oncle*, and tell me the meaning of the riddle?"

The delightful old man replied in the sharp tones of former days:

"Guess for yourself, my dear: you are so clever!" It was already broad daylight when she went up to bed. She found her pillow hard, and tossed and turned for long hours. At last she told herself: "Don't exaggerate the harm that has been done. Probably she is only some one on a visit in one of the villas here: this bird of passage will soon go back to her own country, and then, thank Heaven, we shall hear no more cooing of songs, we shall be spared the sight of her black eyes, and of the hands, which, it appears, are perfect." This consoling thought managed to procure her three or four hours' sleep.

But some hours after, when she went into the *salon* a few minutes before the luncheon hour, she found there once more this odious face she had hoped never to see again, this time surrounded by all the house party.

"*Mes enfants*," said M. Trayaz, "allow me to introduce to you a young lady who will soon be of the family: Mlle. Ameline Verlaque, fiancée of my nephew Silvère Sauvagin."

Huguette felt the tears in her eyes, ready to fall. But she had strength of mind, and vowed to herself she would at least save her honour and not cry.

She did not cry.

CHAPTER XIX.

For the rest of the day M. Trayaz's family was plunged into a silent stupor, only to be compared to that felt by the frogs when the big beam fell splash into their midst. They did not, it is true, hide themselves deep down in the water or among the reeds, but they only approached their beam in fear and trembling. By degrees they began to recover from their confusion, to reason about things, and explain the matter to themselves. The bog-land race never grew familiar enough to jump on to their new queen's shoulder, after she had fallen from Heaven unasked and undesired; but they took courage to look on her face. No one thought of disputing her beauty, which was as clear as daylight. Not even the mother of the deposed favourite, who, in spite of the cruel disappointment caused by so great a fall following hard upon such a prodigious elevation, had to allow that the pretended Spanish girl had wonderful eyes. "Her beauty," she told her husband, "is not in the least like Huguette's; but you must allow it is perfect in its style; her only drawback, in my mind, is that she is rather short-waisted, and not free enough in her movements." They were not long, either, in discovering that she had a charming disposition, was sweet tempered and good-natured, very easy to get on with, and grateful for the consideration they showed her, which, whether they liked it or not, had to be considerable, under pain of incurring the censures of the tyrant, who treated her like a princess, and watched over his lamb with the solicitude of a father.

But what strange caprice had made him send for her? That was the great question that exercised them all day, and often all night. Every one agreed that, whatever he might say, he had no intention of marrying her to Silvère Sauvagin. Although Mme. Limiès, always very careful in what she said, had only hinted at the diplomatic mission on which she had been sent to the Marquis de Coulevreux, she had told enough to convince her daughters and their hus-

bands that their uncle hated Silvère; and they concluded he meant to deprive his detested nephew of the young girl he loved. But what did M. Trayaz want to do with her? About this there were many opinions. Mme. Limiès and Mme. de la Farlède were certain he meant to adopt her, give her a magnificent *dot*, and marry her to some French or American millionaire. On the other hand, Mme. Lejail, her husband, and her brother-in-law felt sure his intention was to keep her for himself, and to push his perversity, want of feeling, and ingratitude to his family to the extreme of marrying the beautiful girl and having a family of his own. In any case, whether he adopted her or married her, she would inherit nearly everything. This misfortune appeared to them all inevitable; the only thing they could do was to make the best of it. No one doubted that the master was extremely fond of her; perhaps one day she would have enough influence over him to control his liberalities, and direct showers of gold where she pleased. She was henceforth a power to be destroyed or propitiated; but how could she be destroyed? Without any concerted action, and though they had carefully abstained from speaking to each other on the subject, they all hit upon the same plan of conduct. They decided it was not enough to be kind to Mlle. Verlaque: they loaded her with attentions, made a regular court round her, disputing with each other for her luminous smile. And there was not one discontented person; if she was as beauteous as the sun, like the sun she shone upon all the world, without distinction of good or wicked.

Mme. de la Farlède and her sister vied with each other in their attempts to win Ameline's confidence and affection. Mme. de la Farlède was almost sincere in her demonstrations, so grateful was she to the newcomer for having humiliated and supplanted her impertinent niece, for having freed La Figuière from an unendurable tyranny. She made far-fetched compliments on her beauty, her singing, her voice, and the perfect taste of all her toilettes. She never wearied of talking to her of Jules's moral perfections, of

trying to interest her in this boy whose rather rustic exterior, if she was to be believed, covered a delicate, sensitive nature: "You must love him," she said, "to find out his worth. What has particularly struck me too, is, that though he is slow as a rule in taking to people, he took to you from the first." She invented excuses to go and sit in Ameline's room, and amuse her with gay talk. She told her Virginie was doing her hair badly, and was not making the most of the glorious black locks and their bluish reflections; she insisted on doing it herself, and was so clever a hairdresser that she accomplished a chef d'œuvre, which M. Trayaz much admired.

Mme. Lejail was at a great disadvantage: she could only smile on Mlle. Verlaque unknown to her daughter, and in the absence of that young lady, who would never have pardoned her for making a truce with the enemy; but are we not bound to serve the interests of those we love, in spite of themselves? Her way was different from her sister's: she did not flatter Ameline, for she had no talent for flattery.

But always grave and dignified, she spoke to her in tones of motherly affection, telling her that young girls need good advice, and offering hers. She reproached her with carelessness about her precious health, took the greatest care to guard her from cold, from heat, from sun and rain, surrounded her with hygienic attentions, which she had never shown her husband. One evening, when they were out driving together, and the wind had grown cool, at the risk of taking cold and spite of Ameline's resistance, she took off her own shawl to wrap her in it.

The two sisters had this in common, that while they lavished on her their attentions and advice, they did their best to penetrate the mysteries of her innocent soul, which had none; every day they cast their nets in these still waters, and were grieved that they never succeeded in taking anything, great or small. Each had her own method: Mme. de la Farlède tried to take Ameline by surprise, asking her sudden and unexpected questions which astonished and disconcerted her. The ex-préfet's wife on the contrary

wrapped her interrogations up in long, puzzling periods, in which were inserted a heap of incidental propositions; she made obscure illusions to certain things that might happen, and to the conduct which might be expected from certain people, in certain situations, towards certain other people. Both methods were equally unsuccessful. The unexpected questions remained unanswered, and the obscure allusions were riddles Ameline did not even try to guess the meaning of. She listened to everything with a sincere desire to profit by instructions, but the more they struggled to make her understand what they wanted, the darker grew her mind as to what they meant. Mme. Lejail believed her supremely deceitful, Mme. de la Farlède pronounced her an innocent, but incomprehensible creature. The fact is, she said nothing because she had absolutely nothing to say. She had not the least idea of the anxieties her sudden arrival had caused, of the jealousy and apprehensions she excited, of the mysterious intrigues which were in conflict around her, and could not imagine she was looked on in turn as an inevitable danger, or as the hope of a whole storm-tossed family. She thought La Figuière was a delightful Purgatory, where one might be very happy, that she had never enjoyed herself anywhere as much, and promised herself to tell Silvère so many things favourable to M. Trayaz, that he would be reconciled with his uncle and often bring her after their marriage to this delightful house, where the women were so charming, that one of them condescended to do her hair for her, and the other handed her her shawl the minute the mistral began to blow cool.

"How kind they all are to me!" she said one morning to Virginie in the fulness of her heart.

M. Sucquier had secretly given his instructions to that intelligent maid, to an accompaniment of gold coins, and she had undertaken to prepare the ground for him.

"I should like to see them be anything else," she replied, "and indeed it is mademoiselle who is too kind to them. In her place, I would take good care to lord it over people of that kind."

"I don't understand you. Why should I be rude to people who are so polite to me?"

"Ah, do you not see they fawn on you, that they are mean and cringing? They can see that mademoiselle is powerful."

"I—powerful?" said Ameline laughing. "You must be mad, Virginie."

"Ah! if Mademoiselle knew the power of her beauty! what a fortune! what a future!"

She added with an air of mystery:

"Mademoiselle has only to will it, and that hypocrite of a Mme. de la Farlède, that scarecrow of a Mme. Lejail would think themselves honoured to be allowed to tie her shoe strings and dust her shoes for her . . . . Eh! don't you understand that if you like you might become mistress of this house and of all you can see from this window, you understand me—of everything!"

"What nonsense! I the mistress of this house? Do you think, then, Virginie, that when I have married Silvère, M. Trayaz will give it to us? When I was a little girl I used to love fairy tales; but one must be sensible, and I never believed they were true stories."

Virginie had plenty of work before her in the preparation of this soil. Her hints were as little understood as Mme. Lejail's rigmaroles and beating the bush. Ameline had an indolent mind, and none of the genius that makes up for hard work; logogriphs were no affair of hers.

Arrived at Aix, Casimir resolved to shake himself free once for all from the most ungrateful, most perfidious of coquettes. He tried to amuse himself and forget his cousin, but she was always present to his eyes. Tired of struggling against his fatal passion, he resolved to submit himself to his destiny, and return to La Figuière; when there is no chance of shaking off one's chain, the best thing is to try to like it.

To his joy he learnt on his arrival that Mr. Hornsby had returned to England. And soon after, without need of questioning any one, discovered that she, who a fortnight

before had wielded sceptre and crown, had fallen from her high estate, and was no longer a personage of importance. But he did not feel sufficiently avenged even by this knock-down blow of fate: he resolved to put the finishing touches to the great downfall by transferring his homage to the new favourite, to whom he paid eager, assiduous court. He was continually at her heels, devising all kinds of attentions, for ever on the lookout to please her. At first his only idea was to rouse Huguette's jealousy; but the favourite had such a lovely face, her complexion was of so golden a brown, that he soon found himself waiting upon her rather for his own gratification than for revenge. When they were walking abroad, he followed her like her shadow: at meal-time he gazed long and lovingly at her pure profile and angelic cheek. More than once M. Trayaz glanced angrily at him; he took no notice.

One evening Ameline said to Virginie.

"M. Casimir is very kind to me; indeed, every one in this house is most kind."

"Oh, M. Casimir is different altogether," said Virginie. "However nice he may be, mademoiselle, I shouldn't trust him too much, if I were you."

"Why not?"

"Well . . . because . . . because . . ." answered Virginie meaningly, still persisting in her belief that she could make herself understood by significant nods and winks, without speaking definitely.

"Because?" replied Ameline; "that's no explanation at all."

Casimir took it into his head to ask her if she would not like to learn to bicycle, and volunteered to teach her: we know how he liked this exercise, especially down steep hillsides where there were ditches. She consented, and the lessons were to begin next day. M. Trayaz got wind of the proposal, and put his veto on it, alleging as his reason that a woman never looks graceful on a bicycle. Shortly after, he took his nephew aside and said:

"Remember that you take care how you treat that little

girl. I don't mean to have you taking any liberties with her."

And as Casimir was beginning to justify himself: "That will do! There are things I don't like to have to say twice, recollect."

"Jealous old man!" thought Casimir. "How I should like to carry her off from you!"

But he never attempted it. After reflecting, he said to himself:

"No, there's no use in poaching on any one else's preserves; I will have respect for his weaknesses. He is old and ugly; but this little bird cannot fail to be sensible of the glamour of his millions: I am no match for him. Casimir, don't be a fool, but come back to your first love."

For some days Mme. Lejail had feared her daughter's health would suffer from the catastrophe of the 10th of April, which seemed at the time to overwhelm her. But after the first effects of the blow, she soon held up her head again, hiding everything under a smiling air of great indifference to her defeat. When her heart was full, she would shut herself up in her room, and meditate sadly on the frailty of her great good fortune, on the odious caprices and diabolical plots of her uncle. She remembered having read somewhere that in the month of October, 1564, Charles IX had spent five days at Hyères, where he took a great fancy to a splendid orange-tree. It had borne in one season, so the chronicler says, more than fourteen thousand oranges, and on its trunk the monarch caused to be engraved: "I glory in having been loved by a king." A few weeks elapsed, and Provence had to go through one of the most rigorous winters she ever experienced; one night's heavy frost was enough to destroy the miraculous orange-tree.

"I also," thought Huguette, "have been loved by a king, and my glory perished in one night."

She had an elastic nature, a horror of being pitied, the stoicism of a vanity which carefully conceals its wounds

and resents condolences as an insult. She smiled at M. Trayaz, and seemed not to feel the slightest resentment at his transferring all his attentions and favours to Mlle. Verlaque, whom he watched with fond eyes, consulting her about everything, burning incense before his new idol, and doing all he could to bring her forward and efface Huguette. She did not wince when he insisted on Ameline's singing the same song over and over again, while he listened each time with renewed rapture, and brutally declared he had never known what singing was before. Her strength of mind went so far as to enable her to be polite to her fortunate rival; she even tried to make friends with her, being curious to see the bottom of a heart which, she was told, kept such jealous guard over its secrets, but which she suspected of being empty. She tried to do her various little ill turns: asking her at dinner all kinds of captious questions in the hope she would give some foolish reply; but Ameline never talked much, and when she did not know what answer to make to any question, got over her difficulty by a smile. This *ingénue* had the wisdom of the serpent. Another of Huguette's perfidies was to press her one evening, when they had visitors, to take part in a charade. M. Trayaz guessed what she meant to do, and had the charade replaced by a tableau vivant, in which Ameline, got up as a Sultana of the Arabian Nights, gleaming with jewels produced from an unknown casket, and which had never before seen the glare of the footlights, made a triumphant success. Huguette seemed in no wise offended.

She had felt her cousin's infidelity keenly; it was hard for her to see him also yoked to the Sultana's chariot. But she gave no sign. Besides, she had foreseen he would lose his trouble, throw away his labour and pains, that his enterprise was a hopeless one, that if he persisted, M. Trayaz would give him a sound rating, and settle his business in no time.

"The idiot!" she thought. "If one is going to do mean tricks, one should at least see that it's worth while first."

She was thus reflecting within herself, at the very moment the jealous old man was saying to his nephew: "Mind,

I don't mean to have you taking liberties with her." She was walking alone in the Park at the time, and had just sat down on a bench when she saw Casimir coming towards her, as if he had been looking for her. He came up and accosted her timidly. She noticed at once that he had the look of a fox who has lost his hen, and Casimir thought her eyes were red, or imagined he thought so:

"How is this?" she asked, "why are you not with your princess?"

"My princess! I have only one, and I am with her."

"Now be honest: confess you are madly in love with Mlle. Verlaque."

"It's you, *ma cousine*, who ought to be confessing you have been very cruel to me."

"And you think you've been punishing me?"

"I wanted to amuse myself, by way of consolation. *Hélas!* I've discovered there's not much consolation to be got out of Mlle. Verlaque, and that I had rather make my moan at your feet than amuse myself with a little stupid, to whom I have to explain all the tiresome things I have to say to her."

"You had better own the game is too well preserved, that there are pitfalls about, and that the owner of the property is not very easy to deal with . . . . You have the confused air of a man who has just had a rebuff."

"A rebuff! what can you be thinking of? I have simply just discovered that it's impossible to quarrel with you for more than a week, and have come to beg you to take me back into your service . . . . In the time of the gay science, when there was a Court of Love at Aix, there was a prize offered for the best answer to the question whether one should admire more an eternal, never intermitted love, or a stormy passion, troubled by frequent quarrels, but which survives them all. A troubadour pronounced in favour of the peaceful kind, saying that the true sun never allows its face to be obscured by clouds; another, who was a better judge, showed him that by consuming and surviving them he gave better proof of his power. All that you have made

me suffer, my love makes me forget, or to change our metaphor, I am one of those poodles it is useless to beat and ill treat, they always come back to the hand that chastises. *Ma cousine*, you may as well make up your mind to one thing, you will never get rid of your dog."

"Honeyed phrases!" she murmured.

Then with a fierce look:

"I will not forgive you unless you rid us of this odious creature."

"I must say you ask a good deal from your servant. I gave you once before a specimen of my skill in starting a feud between my uncle and a cousin of ours who was getting in our way. What you are asking of me now is a much more difficult matter, and even if it were less so, you have paid me so far so badly for my trouble, that I don't feel very much inclined to trust you again. I tell you, whatever reward you may promise me, I intend to take something on account at once."

"As you like!" was her answer.

He was going to kiss her; but she drew back, saying in tones half-reproachful, half-scornful:

"Oh! not that way! that's too stupid."

And she drew off the glove from her right hand:

"Will you have it? Here it is."

The present she was throwing over to him was a suède glove that had been often worn; the traces of wear were very evident, and there was even a hole in one finger; in her more gloomy moments she had often nibbled it with all her pretty teeth. He seized it eagerly and pressed it to his lips.

"Give and take!" she cried. "What will you do to get rid of this adventuress before my uncle marries her?"

"In the first place, adventuress seems to me rather a hard word. In the second place, in my humble opinion he will never marry her. For some time now the inhabitants of this house only speak in enigmas, or are as mute as carps. Still, from some words she let fall, I see that like you, your mother thinks M. Trayaz is going to lead Mlle. Verlaque to

the altar. It's the greatest mistake! He told me one day he considered marriage the heaviest of yokes; however disagreeable he may be, he is not the man to harm himself in order to harm others, and on that score you need feel no alarm. He means to punish Silvère by keeping his fiancée from him: why should he marry her?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and seemed to feel little confidence in his assurances.

"*Mon cousin*," she said, "give me back my glove."

But they were disturbed, and he kept her glove, which she regretted; and his opinions of M. Trayaz's views on marriage, were destined soon to change.

Since M. Trayaz had taken to spending his evenings with his family, the Red Drawing Room had been deserted. Even if he had not been with them, its habitués no longer cared to talk together; conflicting interests and amour-propre had produced a coldness between them all, and far from seeking occasion for meeting, they avoided each other and kept apart. One evening, M. Trayaz had important business to discuss with his agent and withdrew very early. What were they to do without him? It is not easy to entirely root out old habits; they are apt to grow again of their own accord. By this time their interests were no longer conflicting, a common peril united the sisters, who had so lately been foes; they had much to say to each other, many things to ask, and reflections to communicate. One may be silent for a time and swear to keep silence always, but at last it is discovered that a long silence is torture. The sisters and their husbands looked at each other questioningly for a moment, then their ill-feelings were all forgotten, and a few minutes later, mechanically, without thinking what they were doing, to the great joy of Mme. Limiès, who hated quarrels, they found themselves again assembled in what they had called before their conference room. Huguette alone refused to join them; she could not forgive Mme. de la Farlède what she had said about voices harsh as a crow's.

Casimir had gone out to breathe the fresh air in one of

the parks. He had been drinking more than usual that evening, and was over-heated and excited. Generally he was the most sober of men, having no need of wine to exhilarate him, but to-night a new wine from Nuits had just arrived, which smelt of roses, and he had taken more than was wise. The fumes obscuring his brain had scarcely begun to evaporate, when a servant came to tell him tea was being served in the Red Drawing Room. The news rejoiced him. Like Mme. Limiès, he hated dissensions, and preferred the gardens and woods to a silent house. When he entered, a friendly but hot dispute was going on between Mme. de la Farlède and her sister. One said: "He will adopt her!" the other replied: "He will marry her!" And each marshalled her reasons for her opinion.

"Come along, Casimir!" exclaimed Mme. de la Farlède. "We are counting on your perspicacity to settle our differences."

"I believe he will marry her," said Casimir, "and that he left us so early this evening because he means to ask her to-night; I heard him say something just before dinner that made me feel sure."

His assertion was received with a murmur of contradiction. His hearers were unwilling to believe that what they so much feared was really being accomplished.

"Very well," answered Casimir, "you don't want to believe me, I mean to make you. I am going at once to make a reconnaissance in the enemy's camp, and find some proof to convince the most incredulous."

And so saying, he took up his hat and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" they cried.

But he would not tell them, and they tried in vain to detain him; he went out with his head in the air, and the determined air of a knight who puts lance in rest; when he was not a troubadour, he was a cavalier.

"He is a queer fellow!" said Mme. de la Farlède.

"I don't know what to say about him," replied Mme. Lejail, who was always predicting misfortune. "I don't think he quite knows what he is about; I'm afraid he's had

too much of that Nuits wine. He looked to me as if he meant to be up to something or other: he'll be getting into a scrape. May Providence keep him from harm!"

Casimir had not turned in to go to bed. He only went in to change his patent leather shoes for a pair of felt slippers, and started off on an expedition which proved less easy than he had thought it was going to be. The two main portions of the villa were connected on the ground floor by a gallery which was always closed at night; but generally the library, which communicated with both wings on the first floor, and whose windows opened on one side on to the garden, on the other on to the court-yard, was left open. Casimir found it shut up, and was confirmed in his idea.

He would not allow himself to be discouraged; he had boasted he would do more than he now seemed able to and meant to do his best to acquit himself, spite of everything, of his rash undertaking. Ten minutes later, he was out in the garden, with his back against a eucalyptus tree, contemplating the windows of the library, which seemed to be flinging defiance at him. How could he climb up there? It was a bright moonlight night; he noticed that one of these windows was half open, and that a branch of the eucalyptus tree almost reached it. It was impossible to climb up by the tree, whose trunk was stout but perfectly smooth. He remembered seeing a ladder somewhere; went to fetch it, reared it up, and planted it against the wall. He was rather short, but vigorous, supple, skilled in every sort of physical exercise, and when he reached the top rung, he stood up, placed his hands on the window sill, pushed aside the half open casement, and vaulted on to the seat, with a "Here we are at last!"

Thus arrived at the enemy's camp, for a moment he remained motionless, scarcely breathing, every muscle tense, trying to pierce the silence and the gloom. He knew his where-abouts thoroughly, so crept up the spiral staircase to the passage leading to his uncle's study, listened carefully, and heard his uncle's voice in conversation with the agent.

At this moment he fancied he heard movements within

and carefully retraced his steps, carried an armchair with the utmost precaution in front of a deep recessed window, took shelter behind the heavy tapestry curtain, and waited. The wine he had drunk, after having overexcited his brain, was now beginning to stupefy it. He felt his eyelids growing heavy; once or twice he shook himself together, but before very long, was sound asleep.

He was roused by the crowing of a cock which had taken the moon for the sun. He sounded his repeater: and found it was three o'clock. Fearing he would be overtaken by the daylight, his one idea was to beat a retreat. He got back to the window through which he had entered, and put his legs over the sill; but as, clinging with his hands to the ledge, he was feeling for the ladder with his feet he caught his heel against the top rung, and the carelessly wedged ladder tottered and fell heavily, with a dull thud. To add to the misery of his position he thought he heard a heavy footstep resounding on one of the gravel paths. Reaching out one arm, he tried to pull towards him the eucalyptus branch which was on a level with the window sill, and so escape that way: but he could not get hold of it, and suddenly his strength failed, and he fell straight into the middle of one of the flower beds, whose soft soil somewhat broke his fall. He saw ten thousand candles, and after that for a little time knew nothing. Gradually he came to himself again, picked himself up, felt himself all over and congratulated himself on having broken neither arms nor legs. But at that very moment a hand, once sinewy, now for a long time shrunk and flabby, but to which anger had restored all its former strength, caught him so violently by the throat that he thought he would be suffocated.

For some time, M. Trayaz had been suffering at night from an oppression which prevented him from sleeping. It was his custom, when he felt this coming on, to get up and fling open his window to breathe the night air, leaning on the sill. This time he had dressed, come down into the garden, and was breathing the fresh air in one of the garden walks when he heard the sound of a dull fall, followed by

another. Thinking some nocturnal prowler had got into his domains, he made for the suspected spot, recognised his nephew, and grasped him by his neck-tie so violently, that Casimir, who had neither the strength to defend himself, nor the wish to do so, employed the little breath there was left in him to murmur in an agonised voice:

"*Mon oncle*, you are strangling me!"

"How unfortunate!" replied M. Trayaz.

But he consented to let go his hold a little, and seizing one of Casimir's ears which he brutally pinched, said:

"What have you been up to? You fool . . . . I see what it is . . . . I hate people who are inquisitive, and have a horror of spies."

He added:

"I'm going to send you back to your mother, who must be longing for a sight of you. You will return to her by the first train."

M. Lejail's kindly predictions were fulfilled. Casimir had got into a serious scrape this time, and his damaged ear was the smallest part of his woes; in addition to the pain it was causing him, he was feeling the disgrace of having made a blunder, and the unhappy prospect of a long exile which was to separate him from Huguette, and prevent him from putting into execution his admirable manœuvres for gaining her hand. M. de la Farlède, who had heard him return at day-break, full of curiosity, came early to his room to get the first news of his heroic campaign. He accosted Casimir in most smiling, jovial fashion, congratulating him on not being, like M. Lejail, one of those cowards who think of nothing but the safety of their skins, but a man of courage and action, full of zeal for the common cause, and ready to run any risks to serve it. Casimir told him his pitiful story. As he advanced in his narrative M. de la Farlède's manner grew colder and more distant. He was thinking perhaps, like Mazarin, that the most precious quality for men of action is successfulness. Casimir, who knew that the best way to escape being laughed at by others is to laugh at oneself, tried to make a joke of it all. The more

he laughed about it, the graver M. de la Farlède grew, and it was in his iciest tones that he bade him farewell, and wished him *bon voyage*.

When, two hours later, he, who had sacrificed himself for the common cause, started to undergo his punishment, everybody was already up, and thanks to M. de la Farlède, everybody knew what had befallen him. And yet no one had the courage to go and shake him by the hand. It needs a great soul to dare to brave the contagion of misfortune, and there were no great souls at La Figuière. It was Sam who saw the exile off, putting him into the carriage, and doing the last little offices for him with a politeness that was half ironical. Sam had given up making bets: the frequent and sudden "revolutions of the palace" which had been accomplished under his eyes had quite baffled him, and made him a sceptic. But he had never believed in Casimir's chances. He had always said this rustic dandy was a hare-brained fellow who talked too much, that he would take care never to wager anything on a head that contained nothing but wind.

At the very moment that Casimir was being sent off into exile, Mlle. Verlaque, the innocent cause of his misfortunes, was walking in a shady corner of the garden, occupied in reading a letter she had just received from her mother. Suddenly she saw M. Sucquier advancing upon her. It was the first time he had attempted to talk to her tête-à-tête. Hitherto he had kept in the background; he knew how to wait, and now had chosen the most propitious moment: M. Trayaz, since he had got into the way of not being able to sleep till daylight, had taken to coming down late in the morning, and his agent had observed that his window-shutters were still closed.

Ameline felt a vague alarm. However much she might be lacking in sagacity, she had the uncomfortable feeling that a bird has in presence of a basilisk. M. Sucquier sat down by her, and opened conversation by asking her if she was enjoying herself at La Figuière. She told him what she had so often told Virginie: that she thought La Figuière

a delightful place, and enlarged upon the kindness everybody showed her, and especially on all the kindness she received from M. Trayaz.

"And what an instance you are of the ingratitude of womankind!" he said in his most insinuating tones. "He does everything he can think of to make you happy, and you delight in making him unhappy."

"I?" she asked in profound astonishment. "But what can I have done to make him unhappy?"

"Is not an old man very much to be pitied," replied he lowering his voice, "when he loves you dearly, and dare not tell you so?"

"But what do you mean, Monsieur Sucquier?" she cried, "M. Trayaz loves me?"

"Hopelessly, madly."

She looked at him to see if he was joking: he had never seemed more serious. She looked at him a second time to make sure he had not lost his reason: however much Silvère Sauvagin might object to M. Sucquier's face, it was not the face of a lunatic—far from it.

"Monsieur Sucquier," she said resolutely, "it's impossible."

"It is so far from impossible, that it is a fact, and you are, to my knowledge, the only person who still doubts it."

She was struck dumb with astonishment. Then she made a great effort of memory, went over again in her own mind everything M. Trayaz had ever said to her, and felt certain he had never uttered a word the least resembling a declaration. He had paid her many compliments, praised her fine hair, and her lovely voice: so many people had done the same! She forthwith remembered certain talks she had had with Silvère, certain things he had said to her, the look on his face and in his eyes when he had said them, a certain kiss which had roused in her such strange emotions, and revealed a whole unknown world. Yes, it was since then she had known the meaning of the word love. Had M. Trayaz ever said anything to her which had affected her in the same way?

". . . Et là dedans remue
Certain je ne sais quoi dont on est tout émue!"

Had he ever looked at her in that way which proves to you you are loved? Now at least she knew quite well, for she had learnt it from Silvère, what love was, and whatever M. Trayaz felt for her it was nothing of that kind.

That was what she told herself as she tried to reason out this extraordinary and obscure position, which was so unintelligible she quite lost herself over it. Absorbed in this mighty mental effort, she quite forgot M. Sucquier's presence, and that, while giving her time to grasp the situation, he was patiently waiting for her answer. At last she remembered him:

"I assure you," she said, "M. Trayaz has never said a word which could lead me to suppose . . . ."

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he interrupted, "old men are timid; they are afraid of compromising the dignity of their years, the weight of their character; they fear being laughed at; with our white hairs, our heart loses faith in itself and has no more courage . . . It is a true kindness to meet these eager longings half-way, to take pity upon these stricken hearts . . . Try before long to put M. Trayaz at his ease, make the way plain for him, and tell me what happens."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, for if he does indeed love me as you say, it would be a great misfortune."

"What! do you call it a great misfortune to marry a man who would put you in a position to bring happiness to all who surround you, to procure your mother the easy circumstances she has so long been deprived of?"

"He, marry me? But it is absurd . . . Even if he does want to," she continued in most tragic tones, "I repeat, it would be a great misfortune. I am no longer free, the only man I can marry is my fiancé, Silvère Sauvagin."

"You love him very much."

"Very much," she replied without hesitation.

"And you think he loves you?"

"He told me so—and I can't help believing him."

Then he began a long argument to prove to her that Silvère did not love her, that a man who really loves will sacrifice everything for the happiness of the woman he loves. What sacrifices had Silvère made for her? Had he not refused from pride, from a stupid scruple of honour, to be reconciled to M. Trayaz, and in so doing remorselessly cut down Mlle. Verlaque's dearest hopes, destroyed a most brilliant future for her? Then he set to work to prove that this hard-hearted wretch had no sincere affection except for his animosities, that this botanist, who probably did not know half that he boasted he knew, was aggressive, quarrelsome, obstinate, and would continue all his life to make implacable enemies, that she was certain to be horribly unhappy with him, and die in the work-house.

She knew that there was much exaggeration, but a grain, just a tiny grain of truth, in what he said.

"It's no use, monsieur: when he went away, we told each other we would love each other all our lives, our whole lives through."

"One says so many things!" he exclaimed.

And as he knew that Mme. Verlaque carefully intercepted all letters from her future son-in-law, he took pleasure in asking Ameline if Silvère often wrote to her. She confessed that to that day she had neither received letter nor note from him.

"I am not surprised! Paris is the place for amusing one self, and forgetting all about every one else. Believe me, he had not been there forty-eight hours before he had forgotten all about you, and perhaps at the very moment of my speaking to you, he is swearing to a young lady, who certainly is not in the least like you, that he will love her to death, and long after."

She shook her head, so unlikely did such infidelity appear to her; but before long the unlikely had begun to seem possible to her. M. Sucquier was beginning to understand her, to realise that her mind was slow in getting accustomed to new ideas, that she digested them with difficulty; he made a pause, waiting for her to assimilate the beneficent nourish-

ment which he was forcing her to swallow. Then he began a second harangue; he was anxious to persuade her that elderly husbands, when they are really in love, are really preferable to young ones; that they are good-natured and generous and demand nothing; but are content to petition and beg; while the least favour granted to them fills them with delight, makes them as happy as a poor beggar who has just been given a piece of gold.

She listened to him with her thoughts elsewhere. A new idea had taken possession of her: she was asking herself why M. Sucquier was so anxious that she should marry M. Trayaz. If she had had more penetration she would have noticed that when she asked him that question, he became even redder than usual.

"What else can you expect?" he said. "I am naturally deeply interested in the happiness of a man who has always been kindness itself to me. If I knew his life was in danger, I should not be the last to rush for a doctor. In this case, it is his heart that suffers: and doctors can do nothing for suffering of that kind. I came to find you, and to say: 'Make him well!'"

She still persisted in her resistance.

"When you speak, Monsieur Sucquier, I cannot help believing you, but I shall not believe you long after you have ceased speaking . . . . For you know," she added, thinking of Silvère, "when a man's heart is suffering, his face shows it, and M. Trayaz's face has never shown that he is in love."

"But, you most unbelieving young lady, I tell you again, you are the only one who does not know what is today a matter of common knowledge. If I had not good reason to ask you to keep secret what I have said, I should tell you: 'Consult anyone in the house you choose: there is not a single person in it who does not think as I do.' Do you imagine M. Trayaz's sister, his nieces and nephews would be so polite to you if they did not know he loves you so much that he wants to make you his wife, and the sole mistress of his wishes and his fortune?"

Again she was silent from amazement. Virginie had

hinted to her that Mme. Lejail and Mme. de la Farlède paid court to her because she was a power worth propitiating; and she had accused her maid of laughing at her. A serious person, M. Sucquier, now explained to her the meaning of the riddle. If Mme. de la Farlède had one morning done her hair with her own hands, if Mme. Lejail had one evening wrapped her up in her own shawl, it was because an old gentleman felt for her a passion that was making him ill. She had believed La Figuière to be a place where it was possible to enjoy oneself very much: she found La Figuière was a house where dark, mysterious things, which she had never suspected, were happening, and now M. Sucquier had come and sought her out in the orange grove to open her eyes. She came to the conclusion that at La Figuière, and probably in all the world, life was a prodigiously complicated affair. This thought, which had never occurred to her before, caused her such an uncomfortable feeling, that she gave a long mournful sigh.

M. Sucquier saw with delight that his eloquence had not been without effect. He had knocked the right nail on the head, so he proceeded to drive it home.

"Do you know," he said, "that the master of the house has just dismissed most ignominiously his nephew Casimir? Ah, mademoiselle, see how terrible you are! That handsome fellow's only fault was that he paid you too much attention. When a man's jealous, Mademoiselle Ameline, it means he is in love."

This time again she could not help thinking M. Sucquier was right. She remembered that when Casimir had wanted to teach her to bicycle, M. Trayaz had objected with a vehemence she had thought peculiar. Decidedly, life was a very complicated affair, and it was right to say the unexpected always happens.

"At any rate," continued M. Sucquier, "you will no longer be able to doubt if you will agree to a little experiment I propose to make before long."

"An experiment?" she exclaimed in alarm.

And clasping her hands, she looked at him with tearful

eyes that seemed to be begging him to keep this misfortune from her.

At this moment the agent noticed that Sam was opening the shutters of M. Trayaz's bed-room, and judged it best not to prolong any further this clandestine interview. He rose to go, but before leaving passed from the paternal tone to an accent of authority:

"Mademoiselle, we will speak of all this again before long. Mme. Verlaque, I know, has told you to take my advice in everything; we are very good friends, your mother and I; she has confided her interests, which are yours, to my care; be sure I shall never give you any advice she would not give you herself."

Then, with a finger on his lip:

"Be careful; say nothing of this to any one but Virginie."

As she watched him going away, she remembered how one day, when she was a child (Heaven knows she felt she was one no longer), her parents had taken her to a toy-shop to choose a doll. She had to choose between two, and for a moment her heart had been equally balanced between them. One was dressed like a princess, adorned like a goddess; the other, rather poorly dressed, had won her by its attractive face, its charming smile; finally she gave it her preference and had never repented. "You have no idea of making a bargain," her mother told her: "you have been quite taken in." The affair of the two dolls came back to her mind, she saw again in imagination the one she had chosen, its honest eyes, the smile that had charmed her. But she fancied she could hear her mother's voice crying to her from the Avenue des Palmiers: "You have no idea of making a bargain." Left to herself she had a natural tendency to be taken in; a confused instinct warned her it is often the golden way, the way to happiness.

She spent the rest of the day in unspeakable agitation, which was plainly visible in her face; but nobody noticed it: every one was occupied in warding off M. Trayaz's vio-

lent attacks. The last night's adventure had irritated him tremendously, and for the first time since his return from America, he was in a furious rage. Suspecting his nieces and nephews of being all concerned in the plot, he had a sharp word for everybody, and as in his anger he never distinguished the innocent from the guilty, he spoke to Ameline herself in a hard and brutal manner. She thought that quite bore out M. Sucquier's assertions: perhaps he was angry with her for not making things easy for an explanation; perhaps also it was his way of loving. She had never seen Jupiter in a rage: at the noise of his thunder, animals, men, walls, furniture, plates, decanters, and chased silver, from the beginning to the end of dinner, all the world trembled.

As soon as she was in her own room, she told Virginie of her observations, her conjectures, and wound up by repeating word for word M. Sucquier's wily discourse.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Virginie, "it's what I've so often told Mademoiselle; but she would not believe me."

And as Ameline said over and over again that at La Figuière things happened that were as improbable as fairy tales—Virginie told her:

"I've never read any tales; but I am really tempted to believe it's by M. Trayaz's orders that M. Sucquier has been speaking to Mademoiselle, that it has all been arranged between them."

This idea made a great impression on Ameline; she felt all its importance. No, she could no longer doubt what every one called her good fortune, and what she persisted in regarding as a misfortune, for, if it is sweet to be loved by the being we love, it is very disagreeable to be sought by two lovers, between whom a choice has to be made, as the little girl had to choose between the two dolls. What a task! How terrible if she chose wrongly! Truly she felt she was much to be pitied.

Sleep was long in visiting her. She thought of Silvère and the never-to-be-forgotten kiss, and she felt that love is the greatest good, that there is nothing comparable to

certain heart-felt joys. She asked herself too, if Paris is really a place where memory fails, and how it was that Silvère had never written to her. Then she told herself that if M. Trayaz had lost his heart to her, and commanded her to marry him, she would never have the courage; she thought of his face, his stormy frown, and shivered. Why did so many people agree to torment her. Every one knew quite well she detested the idea of this marriage; but her mother wanted it, and M. Sucquier wanted it, Virginie wanted it. Soon Silvère's face began to haunt her anew, and her eyes filled with tears. She made a great resolution: she decided that to recall the past and to think it over, or to reflect on the future, is a wearisome and dangerous proceeding; that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof; that it is useless to alarm oneself beforehand about catastrophes it is impossible to prevent; that it does no good to torment oneself body and soul; that there are things in this world of mysteries it is better not to try to understand, fatalities that must be submitted to as the bird ceases struggling against a wind that is too strong for it.

She got to sleep at last, but had bad dreams, and woke with a feeling that at La Figuière one might have very wretched nights, that it was no place for peace-loving folk, who could not breathe the air there, and that she wished she could go home, that she would go home.

At that moment, through the half open door of her dressing-room came the vague sound of a tap being turned on, and as she opened her eyes on her big room, hung with glistening white silk, and its delicious furniture, whose gilding was reflecting the bright morning sunshine, she caught sight of the smiling Virginie at the foot of her bed, where she was waiting for her to open her eyes, that she might present to her a lovely bouquet of roses, and tell her that her bath was ready. That diverted her from her sorrows: it seemed to her that if La Figuière was not a place of repose and safety, there were to be found in it instead all the elegancies of life, which, it is true, do not satisfy the heart, but which have their value, all the same.

CHAPTER XX.

As soon as he had arrived in Paris, Silvère Sauvagin hastened to M. Martigne, who was engaged, and so unable to see him. He went again, but did not succeed in getting an interview till two days after, and contrary to his expectations, was received with great coldness.

M. Trayaz had learnt through the channel of Mme. Verlaque what his nephew meant to do in Paris, and on whom it was this wild young fellow relied to get him out of his difficulties; so he had taken his precautions. He meant to work on Silvère through Ameline, and he meant too to cut off his supplies. He thought that a lover who was thwarted in his plans of marriage, and who, as well, was in danger of dying of hunger, would become as supple as a piece of elastic, and very easy to deal with. He had already been in communication with M. Martigne to find out Silvère's exact worth, and had told him his great plans; it was natural that he should explain to him why everything was now upset. The very day his nephew started, he wrote a long letter to M. Martigne which ended thus:

"You see he has broken with me, he has just broken with Mme. de Rins, he quarrels with every one. If you feel any friendship for him, do not help him. I undertake to secure his future, to look after him. My intentions, of which I have already informed you, are still the same; but he owes me reparation, and I mean him to pay it. Talk sense to him, give him a lecture, make him understand that whatever his merits, there are defects of character which are very hurtful to a young man, ruin his prospects in fact. Send him back to me in his right mind and repentant, I will receive him with open arms, and kill the fatted calf for him."

This letter had made a great impression on M. Martigne, who considered it extremely sensible. He thought much of Silvère's merits as a man of science, but personally he hardly knew him, not having seen him since their first

meeting. Now he was told that this so promising a botanist had grave faults of character, that he had forfeited, by his bad behaviour, the kindness of an immensely rich uncle whose cash-box was at his disposal. This millionaire's nephew who was appealing to him for help seemed to him like one of those beggars who implore a penny all the while they have piles of gold sewn up in a mattress. Why don't they unsew it, and pull out the gold? Besides, however goodnatured he may be, a member of the institute, when he is very busy, is glad of any excuse for not disturbing himself on his neighbour's account.

So he gave Silvère a wigging, blamed him for his excessive and outrageous over-sensitiveness, telling him our faults often harm us more than our vices.

"You have not even," he told him, "the wisdom of the parrot, who will not leave the perch he is clinging to with his claws, before he has seized on another with his beak. Why did you not keep your situation with Mme. de Rins at least until you had something else to go to? The Germans say a sparrow in the hand is worth more than a pigeon on the roof. But you had a pigeon in your hand and have let it go for a sparrow on the roof."

This unexpected lecture disconcerted Silvère, who gazed at M. Martigne in astonishment. He replied that it was not he who had left his place, it was his place that had left him.

"That's not what your uncle tells me."

"My uncle has written to you? Truly that man is terrible in his revenge. He has evidently sworn to take the bread out of my mouth, to reduce me to beggary. Not content with having got me dismissed from Mme. de Rins, he wants to lose me your friendship, on which I was relying."

He gave a short account of his misfortunes to M. Martigne, who was much interested: the learned love gossip, and oddities are the delight of the naturalist. And yet Silvère's conduct seemed to the professor more amazing than admirable. Like Miss Meg Wheeler, his idea was that a true *savant* will make his pride pass through the eye of a needle if science is to profit thereby.

"That you have the scientific instinct," he said, "I cannot doubt, but I doubt whether you have the temperament of a true *savant*. Your epidermis is too sensitive, your character too unyielding. Science wills that we prefer her before everything, and inures us against vain scruples. Listen to this: a testator, with more generosity than sense, bequeathed lately a considerable sum to our academy, to be bestowed on the astronomers who should succeed in putting us into communication with Mars. Several of our confrères declared that the academy could not, without dishonour, accept such a ridiculous legacy. We represented to them it is easy to read another meaning into the words of a will, and to employ a madman's money for the recompensing of useful work . . . . If you had had, like myself, the advantage of being brought up by the Jesuits, you would know what is meant by the direction of the intention, which consists in eliminating any evil from the means, by dwelling only on the purity of the object that is to be accomplished. It can cost little to shake hands with M. Sucquier, if you tacitly substitute for the intention of being agreeable to him that of rendering great services to science and yourself, by becoming director of a superb Botanical Garden. Believe me, casuistry has its value and can facilitate wonderfully the affairs of this world."

Silvère explained to him why he could never be anything but a poor casuist; that moreover, if he had given way to his uncle on one point, he would soon have had to give way to him in everything, and disgrace himself by every kind of base compliance; that M. Trayas was an odious tyrant who delighted to humiliate those he pretended to love.

"You have a talent for exaggeration," replied M. Martigne. "Oh ardent southern sun, this is how you excite and derange the best brains! My dear sir, I have one piece of advice to give you; take the first train, and go back to make your submission to this terrible and indulgent uncle."

"Never!" he replied, "never!"

In vain his old friend showed him that in Paris, more

than anywhere else even, you must begin at the beginning, that his beginnings would be humble, thankless, painful.

"If I succeeded in getting work for you, it would hardly be enough to keep you. You told me, if I am not mistaken, that you are thinking of marrying. It is all very well to be ready to endure everything yourself, can you make up your mind to see your wife endure too?"

Silvère replied that Mlle. Verlaque loved him enough to make no objections to the restrictions of a life of poverty, that she had always lived very carefully, that Parisian botanists have no idea of Provençal frugality.

"At all events," exclaimed M. Martigne, "I know how easily the Provençal blood begins to boil. You can suffer no constraint, and you will have to put up with every species of constraint. At your first disagreeable, you'll flare up, and I shall be held answerable."

Silvère swore by all his gods that his patience should be angelic, he would be as meek as a lamb.

"I promise you," he said, smiling, "to learn to direct my intentions. Whatever I have to put up with, I will endure, thinking of my desire not to cause you trouble."

Seeing that nothing he could say had any effect, M. Martigne was very perplexed, and as he always did in such a case, resolved to consult his oracle. He had married a wife older than himself; she had brought him a fortune and he thought everything of her; taking her advice in all matters unconnected with botany. He introduced Silvère to her, and she made him stay to dinner. It was Silvère's destiny to please women, without any effort of his own: we ask of a woman that she should be very much a woman, women like a man to be very much a man. Mme. Martigne liked him at once. She made him talk all through dinner, and afterwards; he spoke of his uncle with more sorrow than anger, as one speaks of a rain which has soaked you to the skin, or of a hail which has stripped the fruit trees; but he grew eager over Mlle. Verlaque's charms. She found him delightful; she had a weakness for young *savants* in love; and in a word she began to feel a great interest in

him. M. Martigne saw it, and as he was saying good-night, said:

"I will think over what you want, and see if I can find you something."

"Oh, what good news!" said Silvère, seizing his hands.

"Provided of course you do not repent, and by a return to the ways of wisdom . . . ."

"Advise me rather," he interrupted, "to turn errand-boy or scavenger."

As soon as he was gone, M. Martigne said to his wife, "He is a queer being! I believe he has a big future before him as a *savant*, but away from his science, he's mad!"

"Young men capable of being a little mad interest me," she said: "they are so rare nowadays."

During the weeks that followed, Silvère had no difficulty in filling up his days. He paid frequent visits to two botanical gardens, founded, one in 1626, the other in 1858. The rest of his time he spent in musing. He was enchanted with Paris; it seemed to him that everywhere else in the world the intellect has to look out for itself, but that in this privileged town there is no need to run after ideas, on the contrary the ideas run after the passer-by. He went to see everything, and especially frequented the *salon* of Mme. Martigne, who saw much society. She had a taste for bringing out young men she liked, and did it well; he did his best to do her credit, and imagined that if the men seemed to find him more odd than agreeable, the women appeared to find him more likeable than peculiar.

M. Martigne was cordial and hospitable, but avoided any allusion or word that might give him hope. Silvère began to suspect he had entirely forgotten his promise. By degrees he grew anxious, and Paris lost her charm. Although he had been forbidden to write direct to Ameline, he found a solace for his woes in composing long letters to her in which he took pains not to let his discouragement be seen, and occasionally he received from Mme. Verlaque short, dry replies which ended always:

"Ameline is well. I like to believe that your hopes were

not illusive and that you are being helped to repair your fatal rashness."

Happily for him, she took care not to tell him that her daughter was at La Figuière. If he had once suspected it, he would have set off at once for Provence, and he would have had to repent it, for M. Martigne, to whom he did not do justice, was doing his best for him, being one of those rare men who kill the bear before selling its skin.

One Monday as he came out from an Academy meeting at which Silvère had been present, he took him by the arm and said: "I have news for you."

And as they descended together the staircase of the Palais de l'Institut:

"Are you still of the same mind?"

"Still."

"You persist in preferring the narrow, painful path to the wide easy one."

"More than ever."

"You will not allow me to be mediator between you and your uncle and write to him that you have repented."

"No, never! never!"

"More than ever! Never! that seems to be the extent of your vocabulary; that's to say you'll never behave sensibly, but will be absurd all your life long. If I were to have my own way, I should leave you to your fate; but you have made a conquest of my wife; she has pleaded your cause, and I have been stupid enough to give in. So now I have a proposal to make to you. You needn't open such big eyes: it's not exactly the wealth of Peru. I undertake to get you this autumn a post as assistant-naturalist at the Museum. You know what an assistant is: he has the care of the collections and galleries, classifies the offerings brought in by travellers, prepares the publications of descriptive botany; his salary varies from four to six thousand francs. You are twenty-six years of age: Decaisne was just your age when he was chosen by Jussieu in 1883. He began by being a simple under-gardener. Your beginnings are alike: may you be some day a second Decaisne!"

At this moment they were pacing the *Pont des Arts.* Silvère was contemplating with deep emotion the grey, neglected beard of this rescuing divinity.

"Then, too," continued M. Martigne, "I shall try to supplement your resources. You know I have a great work to complete, and my eyes are beginning to give out. I shall let some of my task devolve upon you. So my wife has decided in her profound wisdom, and she will settle too the rate of pay. What bothers me is this unfortunate idea of a marriage which complicates everything. A bachelor can always manage somehow. Couldn't you give up Mme. Verlaque? . . . . Oh, you needn't jump down my throat! You've got your eternal 'Never' ready, I know. And to tell the truth if you were more sensible, Mme. Martigne's interest in you would be very much less than it is; it's young fools in love who especially interest her. Oh, and I was to tell you that she owns on the Quai de la Tournelles, a few yards from the Jardin des Plantes, a very decent house, *ma foi!* On the fifth floor there's a little flat which will be empty next quarter. It's true it has a northern aspect, but it has double windows and good stoves. From the balcony you can see the quay, the old bookstalls, the barges going up and down the Seine; you will settle about rent with my wife."

And as Silvère was trying to find words to express his gratitude:

"I have no right to your gratitude, go and say thank you to Mme. Martigne. She told me she expressly wished it so: and I execute her orders, but very much against my will, and my conscience is not at all easy. When I compare what she offers you with what M. Trayaz has already offered you, it seems to me she is lending a cord to a man who wants to hang himself."

"With friends like you and Madame Martigne," replied Silvère, "any one would have a right to believe in his future, and I believe in mine as firmly as I believe this balustrade is made of iron."

And he knocked his cane violently against the solid

balustrade. Beside himself with delight, he hastened to Mme. Martigne, whom he thanked enthusiastically, rapturously. As soon as he got back to his own rooms, and his sober senses, he wrote a letter of four pages to Ameline.

"They say," he wrote, "we shall have to make up our minds to a hard time of it at first. Can there be such a thing as a hard time to those who love? Believe me, love works miracles. Only a short time ago I stood still on the Quai de la Tournelle, to take a look at our balcony, which has a view of the Seine. I fancied I could see us both there: we were leaning over to see the passers-by and the boats, and oftener still we were looking at each other. I tell you we looked as happy as two lemon-trees in blossom. We will love each other all our lives, won't we?"

If he could have had his own way, he would have been off within twenty-four hours after despatching his letter, so eager was he to see Ameline again, to tell her all, explain everything. But the rescuing divinity wanted to introduce him to the Museum authorities and Mme. Martigne was going to give a big dinner in a few days, and was anxious he should be there: could he refuse her anything? So he waited another week in Paris. At last he started, feeling his heart as light as a feather, and as gay as the lark. He communed with the invisible powers who govern destinies, men, and gardens. We know he had little taste for materialistic doctrines; happiness increased his idealism.

It seemed to him, in his great joy, that matter is only an appearance, that bodies are composed of incorporeal molecules, of an infinite multitude of infinitely minute souls, and that there existed one infinitely great soul which contained them all and communicated continually with them and with himself.

As soon as he arrived at Hyères he hurried to Mme. Verlaque, whom to his great astonishment, he found alone, and whose face wore an expression that boded him no good. In one breath she gave him two pieces of news: she told him that Ameline had been for nearly a month at La

Figuière, and then that if he wanted to get married, he must ask M. Trayaz for her hand.

The great conspirator had not been deceived in his expectations: it was a terrible blow. Lost in thought, Silvère tried to consider all the extent of his disaster. It was all over, his happiness was a foundered barque that had been shipwrecked on the coast. When he succeeded in finding his tongue:

"What, then, madame," he exclaimed, "have you broken your word to me without giving me the least warning?"

"It seems to me," she replied, "that you released me from it. Your incomprehensible outbreaks made everything uncertain. You wrote to us that you had prospects of employment, and kind friends who promised to assure you a future. I fear there is no reality in all that beyond the famous balcony where you can watch the boats go by; is that enough to provide for a wife? . . . Whatever has happened, you must arrange everything with M. Trayaz. Persuade him, and Ameline shall be yours."

"How is it possible, madame, that a mother can authorize a stranger to dispose of her daughter's hand?"

"Oh," she replied with increased hauteur, "I am not going to have you dictating to me what you think my duty. I have absolute confidence in M. Trayaz's judgment and character: whatever his decision may be I ratify it in advance." She accompanied her words with an enigmatical look which was like a veiled threat and boded greater misfortunes still, so that he trembled under it. He bowed and went out, pale with anger and fright. He tried to calm and reassure himself; he said over and over again:

"Ameline loves me; I am sure of her—sure of her heart."

He said it, but he could only half feel sure of it. As he walked down the Avenue des Palmiers debating with himself what he had better do, he heard himself called by name, and turning round, found himself face to face with Casimir. He was doomed to meet him at the decisive moments of his life, and always, in the Avenue des Palmiers. After being

sent off in disgrace from La Figuière, Casimir had not cared to go back straight to Aix; he was in no hurry to tell his mother his adventures, and had come to seek in a town he was very fond of, distractions for the woes of a long exile.

"Back again already?" he said to Silvère, slipping his arm into his. "Well—we have been going it in your absence. The dove has left her nest, and you have found it empty. You don't look particularly pleased, and I can imagine you are not. I can give you news of her; I will not hide from you that she seemed very delighted with her new cage."

There are lulls which precede and prepare for storms: it was in a quiet, almost gentle voice that Silvère said to Casimir, taking away his arm:

"What do you suppose were M. Trayaz's intentions when he sent for Mlle. Verlaque to come to him?"

"How can I tell you, my boy? Our estimable relations are divided in their opinions about that. Some say he means to adopt her, others, and I am of their mind, that he means to marry her . . . I should advise you . . ."

"Oh, excuse me," interrupted Silvère looking at him distractedly, "I did not ask for your advice; we are hardly friends enough for that yet."

At these words his eyes fell on a clock in the neighbourhood, and he calculated that he would have two hours to spend at home before catching the Sud-France train which arrived at Lavandon in the evening, and he turned his back on his friend.

"What a rage he is in!" thought Casimir. "There will soon be a row at La Figuière."

And though he was not vindictive, his face expressed delight. He almost felt inclined to urge on the combatants with voice and gesture. But the thought of his lady love coming into his head, his brow contracted, and he uttered a mournful sigh. At that moment he caught sight of a pretty girl walking along in front of him; as he mechanically followed her, he told himself that his cousin Silvère was alto-

gether wanting in philosophy in his way of regarding things; that a very little is enough to console a philosopher for his misfortunes in love.

"Without reckoning either," he added, "that what comes by way of consolation is sometimes preferable to what is generally considered happiness."

CHAPTER XXI.

SILVÈRE was at the station twenty minutes before the train started. There were not many people about. He got into a compartment which was empty, and felt thankful for being alone: he was afraid of curious fellow-travellers, afraid that they might discover his secret, that they might guess he had a loaded revolver in his pocket, and meant to use it.

When he reached Lavandon, it was a quarter to seven; and he decided to stay at that one of the two Lavandon inns which he had never visited, and whose owners did not know him. He was shown into the room where the regular habitués were dining. He tried to eat too, but could not. He looked round at these unknown faces, and felt sure they must be thinking of M. Trayaz and Mlle. Verlaque. They had no such idea in their heads. They were talking of their own small affairs, which had nothing in common with his. From time to time, in intervals of quiet, he could hear the voices of the outside world; the vague murmur of the waves lapping on the sand of the beach. The sea, too, had its own affairs to occupy itself: it had never heard of either M. Trayaz or Mlle. Verlaque, and cared very little about them.

It was written, however, that he should not leave the inn without hearing Mlle. Verlaque's name. When he went into the kitchen to settle his account, he caught sight through the open doorway of two men at the bar sitting at a table before a bottle of old wine. One was facing Silvère, who did not remember having seen before his enormous carroty whiskers, but by his livery he recognised him as one of M.

Trayaz's coachmen. He only saw the back of the other: but from his figure and his very unusual accent, he could tell without difficulty that he was an American valet-de-chambre, by name Sam. The innkeeper went up to them to draw the cork of their bottle.

"Where have you come from, John?" he asked the man with the whiskers.

John replied he had just been taking his ladies and gentlemen to a villa in the neighbourhood, where they had been invited to dinner, and a dance afterwards.

"And you, Sam, what have you come for? Have you turned groom, my lad?"

Sam condescended to explain that out of pure good-nature he had taken the place of the footman, who had that morning lost his biggest molar tooth.

"I only see one landau," replied the innkeeper, who had drawn back the curtain to look out into the street. "However did you manage to get them all into that?"

"There were only five of them," said Sam. "We have up at our place a gentleman who has been a prefect, and never goes out now in the evening. It takes him all his time to get rid of one cold, and try not to catch another."

"And the master stayed at home to keep him company?"

Sam looked at him with an air of pity, so very inadequate did his way of explaining things seem to him. John, whose pride it was to model himself on his master, replied haughtily:

"You should know that, though we like to be hospitable ourselves, we never accept any one else's hospitality."

"Besides," said Sam, "what should we have done at their ball? We had no young lady to take care of. Mlle. Verlaque got up this morning with a head-ache, and this evening she did not feel inclined for a dance."

"She would have been the queen of the ball," said the innkeeper, smacking his lips. "My word, but she is pretty!"

"I don't know what to say about her, you greedy animal," replied Sam, slipping two fingers between his collar

and his neck, and glancing furtively across into the mirror behind the counter to assure himself his necktie was straight.

"No, I don't know what to say about her. I like the other much better; if you gave me my choice, she's the one I should go for. She has more *chic* and more go. I like women with go. Your Mlle. Ameline never knew what she wanted yet, and never will. Don't you bet anything on her, you'd lose."

"I've no objection to her," simpered John caressing his whiskers. "When I take her out for a drive, and there's a question of which way we're to go, it's always I who decide."

"Well then, old fellow," broke in Sam with a friendly nudge to the innkeeper, "will you give me Mlle. Huguette? She would suit me like a glove."

"I'll let you have her, my lad, if you'll let me have the one who has no will of her own."

"Ah, you're too late, Mr. Publican—the place is taken. I swore to make no more bets," he added, emphatically: "well, you see this watch, which beyond its real value has for me a value of associations which I might say makes it priceless to me: well, I'll wager you this precious watch that we shall have a wedding before long . . . ."

"D'you think I didn't know that? Why the old post-wife was just telling me . . . ."

At that moment a dispute arose at a neighbouring table where there was a game of cards going on, and the rest of their talk was lost in the confusion.

Shortly after, Silvère went out. At first he walked along by the shore; but the scrunching of the sand under his feet irritated him, and the sea annoyed him with its monotonous murmur, which seemed to proclaim indifference to his agony. He wanted to get away from it, and left it on his left, striking off into a rough path which sometimes led through clumps of tamarisk, sometimes round by bushes of lentisk, and which was often interrupted by ditches over which he had to cross on a plank. They were at the end of April; nine o'clock had just struck from a distant church tower. The night had grown suddenly dark, and the moon, which

was on the wane, had not yet risen. Yet he did not once stumble; he walked with the precision of a somnambulist; it seemed to him as if his one idea was going on before him, holding in its hand a lantern to show him the way. He thought of Sam, of the old post wife, and said to himself:

"There can be no question of it now; it has already become public talk."

Then he felt his pocket to see that his six-barrelled revolver had not been lost on the way. He could have said to it with the utmost sincerity: "You are my most faithful friend."

Arrived at the foot of the smaller cliff he climbed it rapidly, and came down the other side at a run. He approached the painter's house, which had been so long uninhabited, and to his intense surprise discovered there was a light in a big room which had been formerly used as a studio, and whose large windows looked out on to the sea. He continued to advance. When he had reached the little landing-place, he climbed up the parapet, and standing on tip-toe saw in the middle of the brightly lit room a thin old man bending over a table strewn with papers, at which he was writing a letter. On finding himself so near the man he meant to kill, he experienced a swift and violent revulsion of feeling. Suddenly an owl startled him with its mournful note: he shuddered, and asked himself if it had not been out of his own throat that weird cry had proceeded.

For some days M. Trayaz had been sleeping in the chalet that had been christened the Antonine. He had been suffering from such acute irritation of the nerves that he felt anxious to get as far away from his charming relations as was possible. Having surprised Casimir in the very act of flagrant spying, he suspected all his heirs presumptive of being in the plot, and if he had obeyed his first inclination would have sent them all off at once with Casimir. But he thought better of his first impulse, and devised another method of chastisement for them. Mme. Limiès too had acted as ambassadress for the family, and had given him

such conclusive explanations that he pronounced himself satisfied, and with Casimir for scapegoat, signed articles of peace. But the unfortunate incident had given him a lesson; from that day he paid much less attention to Ameline, and treated her with great coolness. It occurred to him that a chalet situated close to the sea would be an excellent little abode for a man who suffered from oppression and difficulty of breathing at night, and that he would probably be much better there. He had benefited greatly by the change; he had better nights, and the murmur of the waves soothed him to sleep. The evenings he spent in this solitary dwelling, where the furniture, which had been carefully preserved, was extremely rustic, and where M. Sucquier and Sam were alone allowed to enter, were very pleasant ones. He thought over old times, and imagined he was once more living his old life; the Antonine and its modest plenishings restored a little of that happiness which is only experienced *before* the making of a fortune. In one corner there was an old arm-chair covered with black leather, worn and scratched and a little bit shaky. He often sat in it, and then for some minutes his shoulders ceased to groan under the weight of his years and his millions.

At present he was busy with a letter he was writing, and he intended to send another to Miss Sally Wheeler as soon as he had finished the long missive he was inditing to Mr. Brodley: business letter and billet doux were to travel together in the same envelope.

Silvère had cautiously drawn near the large circular headed window which M. Trayaz was in the habit of leaving open. It was very low, and Silvère could easily have stepped into the room; he had only to stretch up his arm to reach the iron bar that held it back, and his foot could without difficulty get a hold in the wall at the side. Silvère settled himself down to watch. At intervals he could hear the scratching of the pen on the paper, and sometimes too a great sigh.

"His second youth does not satisfy him," he said to himself. "He is regretting his first . . . . Two steps further,"

he added to himself, "and this little weapon will stop all regretting once for all."

Suddenly he perceived in the distance a will-o'-the-wisp light which looked as though it might be a lantern advancing through the pines in the direction of the house. Then he thought he heard a murmur of voices, and in another moment the creaking of the little wooden door-step, sheltered by a porch, which led to the gallery that ran along the front of the Antonine, and faced to the South. Then everything was silent; but a moment after there came three little taps at the studio door. M. Trayaz sat up, put down his pen, and cried out: "Come in!"

The door opened, and Ameline entered.

She was in such a state of trepidation that she stood motionless on the threshold, looking on the ground without saying a word. M. Trayaz was prodigiously astonished; he seemed unable to believe his eyes.

"Shut that door!" he called out sharply. "Can't you see the window is open, and there's draught enough to blow my lamp out, and kill in a second all the Lejails in the universe?"

She obeyed and shut the door. Her emotion was almost too much for her, this was not the kind of reception she had been led to expect. She bitterly regretted having come, and wished she could get away again; but it is easier to enter the lion's den than to get out of it.

"Come here, my dear. Why, what's the meaning of this? How long is it since you took to coming out alone at night?"

"I was not alone," she replied, in her childish way: "Virginie came with me."

"Do you see that you have managed to tear your dress?"

"I caught it on a bush as I came along."

"Well, there's no great harm done; a torn frock can be mended, or at the worst can be replaced by a new one. What is more serious is an injury to one's reputation—that gone, nothing can replace it. Tell me, what have you come here for?"

She replied, struggling desperately for self-possession, that for some time she had been very unhappy; that after being kindness itself, he had entirely changed in his manner towards her, so that she was afraid she had incurred his displeasure, and had in some way vexed him; that she was tormented by this idea, which prevented her from sleeping, and wanted to make peace with him; that, taking her courage in her two hands, she had come to beg him to tell her what he had against her, and how she could repair her unintentional wrong-doing.

He listened attentively, and did not believe a single word of her story.

"I wonder what is the meaning of this!" he murmured.

All that he could be certain of was that at this moment she glowed with a provoking beauty, that there was a strange light in her eyes, and on her lips one of those doubtful smiles that serve to hide a great embarrassment. He felt the intoxication of her loveliness more strongly every moment.

"Why, truly," he exclaimed, "I should be a fool not to make the most of such an opportunity."

Then, after a short silence: "Mademoiselle, accomplish your destiny! Come here and kiss me!"

He turned his back on the window, so that he did not see a hand suddenly grasp the window-frame.

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

She was smiling no longer. She was afraid. M. Sucquier had deceived her then; this was not what she had expected. The old man she had believed hopelessly in love with her was looking at her with eyes which told of desire, while his mouth expressed contempt for her. She began to understand, to divine the meaning of it all. It was as if a rent had been made in the fog that shrouded her brain. Frightful mysteries she had never dreamed of were suddenly revealed to her innocence. What was before her? She had a vague feeling that some imprudences are irreparable, that one may enter a chalet one person, and leave it another.

"Come here, my dear; what are you waiting for? Try to imagine that I am young and charming, that it is possible to have a wrinkled skin, and dulled eyes, and keep the heart of a young man. Don't you know millionaires are always lovable?"

Instead of coming to him, she recoiled as if in terror at an abyss that yawned before her, into which she was afraid of falling. She recoiled as far as the wall, and the wall, resisting her efforts to force herself a passage through it, she cowered down on a chair, hid her face in her hands, and burst into tears. Her childish sobbing, pitiful as it was, did not touch him. But with a shock it brought him to his senses. He felt ashamed of his mistake, and said to himself:

"Why, she is like a child of ten, and it's time I forgot that I was ever twenty. What a fool I have been!"

He rose, came to the weeping girl, and lifting her head, said in fatherly tones, "Don't cry. I don't like children who cry, and there is nothing to cry about. Come, smile, and be happy once more. I must have a smile; if you don't smile I shall be angry."

He took a pomegranate flower which she was wearing and caressed her mouth with it, till by degrees the smile came back to her lips.

"That's right!" he said.

While she dried her lovely eyes, he was curiously watching and examining her. Then he leant towards her to say,

"I will tell you my opinion of you in one word. Mademoiselle Ameline Verlaque, you have no conscience . . . . you are the angel of vice."

She felt no offence at this harsh judgment, and did not cease to smile. It was less what was said to her than the tone in which it was said that made her smile or cry, and though M. Trayaz's tone was no longer paternal, it seemed to her that his big voice had a kindly ring, and that all is well that ends well.

He, on the other hand, was beginning to feel the effects

of the scene he had just gone through, and the effort he had had to make to get the mastery over himself again. Beads of perspiration covered his brow, and his arms fell heavily at his side.

He walked up to the window, and sniffed the air and the salt smell of the sea-weed. If the moon had been brighter he would have seen at his feet a young man, who was so interested in the scene that was being enacted before him, that he no longer had a thought of his own concealment. But he did not see him; he only perceived that the sea was speaking very softly, that slumber was overtaking it.

"It is happier than I," he thought, "I shall not sleep tonight."

He walked away from the window, sat down heavily in the old black leather arm-chair, and fixing on Ameline the severe eyes of a judge questioning a criminal:

"Now," he said: "I mean to get to the bottom of this. Tell me the truth, the whole truth: when little girls tell stories they have to be whipped. I know you well enough, young lady, to know that you have not come here of your own accord; there's some one else responsible for this, I mean you are acting on some one's suggestion. Who is that some one? I want to know."

She had grown quite pale; her lips and hands were trembling. In vain he plied her with questions, she only answered by a mournful silence; there is a force in passive resistance, and it was the only force she possessed. He began to grow impatient, when suddenly he slapped his forehead and exclaimed:

"Young lady, there is a little bird that tells me most things, and it tells me the author of this expedition of yours, who has devised and carried out the whole thing, is M. Felix Sucquier. Like my foolish nephews and stupid nieces he has got a most ridiculous idea into his head, and has persuaded you that I am in love with you; that if you knew how to set about it, you would easily induce me to marry you. Don't attempt to deny it: I am certain I am right."

She was stupefied, it was impossible for her to understand how any man could thus read the thoughts of others. He seemed to her like some wizard, and in her confusion she put her handkerchief to her eyes, as if, though she was forced to hear the home-truths he was telling her, she meant at least to spare herself the torture of seeing him utter them. At last she broke the long silence, and began hurriedly to stammer sentence after sentence that she had not the courage to complete:

"Oh, monsieur, do forgive me, and do not believe . . . . No, do not believe . . . . I tell you, I assure you . . . . I told him it was madness, that he must be dreaming . . . . I did not want to come, but he made me . . . ."

At this her feelings were too much for her, her voice broke, and she burst into loud sobbing and crying.

"For goodness sake, child, stop that. I told you before I can't bear children who cry. I will allow that M. Sucquier is a persuasive and eloquent orator; but do you know what, in your place, I should have answered to this good apostle? I should have said to him: 'I am not free now; I have given my word to a young man whom I love very dearly' . . . . But it seems to me you don't love him at all."

"Oh, don't say that!" she sobbed, clasping her hands, "I love him very much—I love no one but him."

"She loves him very much! she can still say so to me! She has a queer way of loving! Why really, little girl, I've a very good mind to take that hunting knife you see on the nail over there, and use it to find out how your pretty little heart is constructed, and what there is inside it." And as she was beginning to protest once more: "Hold your tongue," he cried, "and listen to me. You don't seem to have the least idea what you have been doing in following M. Sucquier's indiscreet advice; but I tell you, the thing I care about most in the world is getting my own way, and what I want just at present is to get you married to my nephew Silvère Sauvagin, whom I should like to send to the bottom of the sea. Still I like to be honest in my dealings with him,

and if I have taken his pretty little doll away from him for a time, I haven't the least intention of keeping her for myself: Mlle. Verlaque is in my eyes a trust for which I owe him a faithful account. Eh, *mon Dieu*, what advantage would it be to you to become my wife? People say I have ninety millions of money; supposing I have, what would you do with them if I myself don't know what to do with them? My mouth is bigger than yours, and my teeth can take bigger bites than yours. You are hankering after my riches? Believe in my experience, mademoiselle, a great fortune is only rotten fruit that attracts the flies. That's the first part of my sermon. Are you listening to me? Mind you don't go to sleep."

He did her injustice: she was not in the least likely to go to sleep. Sitting on a low chair in her dark corner, twisting in her hands a handkerchief wet with tears, that she had squeezed into a rag, she was listening with rapt attention. He was bringing her back to the way she had always held the only right one, the only one which could bring her happiness. What he was saying so grandly and impressively was what she had said a hundred times to Virginie and M. Sucquier, when they were dinning their evil counsels into her ears, poisoning her mind by their captious arguments. She was beginning to feel again a great happiness: even so, a believer, whom heretics have been trying to convert, until they have succeeded in confounding his right reason, feels, as it were, restored to himself, when a man full of authority, an apostle of holy learning, confounds those sophists and strengthens his wavering faith.

"Now I will go on again," he continued, "the flood gates are opened, and the torrent cannot be kept back. Your illusions are pardonable, but you must know, mademoiselle, that I have bought from *Madame votre mère* the right to dispose as I like of your dainty little person, and marry you to whom I please. Oh, you needn't look like a frightened gazelle. I shall give you to him, but not before I feel inclined to. I will give him his doll when he submits to me in every way. I have a right to expect submission. I shall amuse myself

by making him wait, by torturing him, and rendering him wretched; I will put his patience and pride to a hard trial. I mean this young oak to become as supple and pliant as an osier. Yes, I shall rejoice in making him suffer . . . . Try to understand me—Heaven give you wits for this once, at least! I have a great esteem for this young man whom you love in such a strange fashion, and at times I hate him."

He had risen; he was walking backwards and forwards; his hands in his pockets, sometimes turning round to speak to her, sometimes speaking to no one in particular, sometimes speaking to himself.

"I hate him," he said, "because he has defied me, and I have never allowed any one to defy me. I hate him especially because the beggar is richer than myself, and can enjoy without effort pleasures I am unacquainted with. I have toiled and toiled, I have sacrificed body and soul to heap up money, and my heart is breaking with melancholy and ennui. To be quite just, it is only the rich who have the right to be happy; and Monsieur takes the liberty of being so. Spite of his poverty, his haughty good luck is scandalous; it defies and insults me . . . . Oh, don't be afraid I mean to do him any harm! I mean to shower favours upon him, only I mean to prove to him too that he is wrong in thinking himself a phœnix, that he is of the same clay as the rest of us, that his virtue is at the mercy of accidents, that he is as likely to succumb to temptation as any one else, just as prone as you or I to worship a mistaken good, and false gods. 'Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great!' is written on his face. I mean to efface this inscription, to whitewash this insolent façade, so that no one will recognise it . . . . Once upon a time, mademoiselle, there was a man who sold his shadow to the devil and thought he had made a good bargain. What's the use of a shadow? He found though that he could not get on without his, and would have given anything to get it back again. I will buy his shadow from this young fighting cock, and then he shall live in clover. I will pay him so well that he will thank Heaven for having given him such

an uncle, but his pride will crow no more. I shall be rid of his unbearable cock-a doodle-do . . . . But enough of all this; I am forgetting who it is I am speaking to. One should not throw pearls before . . . . Angels."

Ameline had found it more difficult to follow this second speech than his first, she had lost her footing in this deeper water. She had gathered from it, though, that M. Trayaz would only marry her to Silvère after he had settled his account with the young fighting-cock. That was tiresome, but not in the least alarming. Convinced henceforth that it was to be her lot to love Silvère dearly and marry him, she thought she would be all the more certain of being happy with him, if an old man whose head contained treasures of wisdom, brought him by severe discipline to greater mildness of disposition, taught him to be more gentle and amenable.

"I have an American friend," he said, "who is the mother of two twin girls. I don't care for the mother, she has no common sense, but her daughters are charming, especially the one whose name is Sal. If Sal were here I should not have to explain to her how it is a man can at once be very lucky and very unlucky for having sold his shadow . . . . Would you like to see Sal? There she is."

And he pointed to a photograph hanging on the wall.

Though she cared nothing at all about Sal, she got up at once and crossed the room to look more closely at the face of this young American girl he seemed to think so highly of. Thin, slender, holding herself very upright, with a deliberate, resolute expression, and steadfast look, Sal was represented standing in the middle of an avenue in a park, holding in her right hand a switch with which she was threatening a little spaniel reared on his hind legs, and probably objecting to the unconscionable length of time he had to pose.

"She is not the least like a flower," said M. Trayaz, "but more like a very sinewy little animal who has ideas of her own, and has lost no time in finding them. She is only twenty, and has already an air of authority; everything in

her is clear and precise. You feel that in everything she goes straight ahead, that she takes care to do all she does with the least possible expenditure of force, movement and speech."

"She is very, very pretty," said Ameline, to please him.

"Well, no," he replied shrugging his shoulders. "In comparison with Mlle. Verlaque, Sal is a perfect little fright; but if her eyes are not black diamonds and if her hair is not nearly as long as that of the most lovely girl in Provence, she is on the other hand much less short of ideas."

Sal would have guessed probably why as he said these words, his eyes were hard, and his voice harsh; Ameline was never troubled with useless curiosity. Another idea too had come into her head, and was troubling her to the complete exclusion of any other.

"Monsieur," she said thoughtfully, "will you allow me to ask you a question?"

"Yes, ask; it is the first time and I hope it will be the last."

"Oh, monsieur, do you think he loves me still?"

"And why should he not love you still? Thank Heaven he knows nothing of this interesting interview."

"M. Sucquier told me Paris is a place where one forgets."

"What has the dear little linnet been getting into its head? Don't you understand, Baby, that your eternal Sucquier has had two ends in view in this matter, first his own benefit, then somebody else's loss? What man can resist the temptation of doing a good thing for himself when it involves too the undoing of his enemy? It's a double bargain, and in this sad world one does not often get an opportunity to combine profit with pleasure . . . . Besides, mademoiselle, there's one thing that will show it. Mme. Verlaque has done me the honour of informing me that Silvère will be back to-day. Perhaps in a few hours he will be here. You may believe me I shall rejoice to see him."

At these words he snapped his jaws and his fingers as one would to frighten away some cat or bird:

"And now you must be off! away with you!"

Holding the lamp in his left hand, and leaning his right on Ameline's shoulder, he accompanied her to the little step.

"What a dark night it is . . . confusion! I shall have to take this little fool back to the house, after being disturbed by her in my writing."

"Oh, please don't trouble," she stammered: "Virginie is waiting for me."

"And I'll wager," said he, "that she's not alone."

She turned and fled, without daring once to look back: this wizard's marvellous insight into things terrified her.

History relates that as a matter of fact Virginie was afraid of the dark, and before embarking on this adventure she had stipulated that M. Sucquier should accompany her, and that at this moment they were engaged in intimate conversation.

Ameline disappeared from sight, M. Trayaz called after her in his shrillest, most penetrating tones:

"When you see M. Sucquier, you may tell him for me he's a regular idiot."

A few moments before, Silvère had noiselessly disappeared. As he felt his way back to the road, the moon which had shown forth at last, came to his assistance, and succoured him with her helpful, tranquil, silent presence. For a whole hour he had been listening to the talk of an old man and a young girl; what they said had filled him with horror and hatred of all human speech: the voiceless stars seemed to him divine creations. Arrived at Lavandon, he took the first path he found, and till morning dawned walked hither and thither on the mountain in bitter and unavailing grief. At daylight he had seated himself on a solid piece of rock. The sky had gradually clouded over; wrapped in a thin haze, the sea had taken on a tinge of ashen-gray: its waves seemed languid, and in patches as heavy as lead; further away on the horizon it seemed to melt and vanish and disappear in mist. Silvère reasoned with himself; an inner voice was saying to him: "Banish

woman from your heart and mind; love your work so well that it can take the place of any happiness woman could give you. Ah yes, life, without a woman in it, has hours as sad and dreary as this sea which yesterday rolled so blue and purple, and which this morning has waked in fog. We must learn to be content with a gray happiness; that is all that destiny owes to a man, it is for him to do the rest; otherwise of what use to you would be the most precious part of you, your will and your courage?"

He watched the growing of the dawn, which was as gray as the sea. As he gazed around, his eyes fell on a tall plant that two years ago he had had the delight of discovering for the first time. It was a *dauphinelle staphisaigre*, and he knew it in the distance by its big palm-like leaves, its spiky flowers bristling with soft hairs. He got up to gather one of these spikes and pressed the blue flower to his lips, saying:

"You are held poisonous, and yet we can kiss you without fear of repenting it."

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN M. Lejail, who was so competent a judge in matters hygienic, heard that M. Trayaz had removed his sleeping quarters to a chalet on the very edge of the sea, his verdict had been: "It is extremely unwise of him, he'll suffer for it." And after great enthusiasm over his hermitage, and many declarations that he slept better there than in the villa, M. Trayaz began to suffer again from insomnia and oppression. A letter too which he had received from Silvère the day after he had expected to be visited by him in person had its share in upsetting his health. The letter ran thus:

"MY DEAR UNCLE: You are one of those fearsome and benevolent genii who with apparent cruelty work out the

happiness of those they love. I have seen through your secret designs and am filled with gratitude. Your idea was that the too comfortable life I was leading with Mme. de Rins could not fail before long to destroy my courage and my intellect; you gave me an unexpected spur by turning me out of my situation; I have found another which, though probably less pleasant, is more worthy of me. You had divined also that Mlle. Verlaque's character is weak and unreliable, that she is a reed shaken by every wind, and that in joining our two destinies I should commit an irreparable mistake; you have taken her from me: keep her; you will now have to provide for her future, it is only justice you should do so.

"Your grateful nephew,
"SILVÈRE SAUVAGIN."

This short letter, which M. Trayaz did not read a second time, caused him one of the bitterest disappointments he had ever experienced in his life. All he had devised and arranged had been in vain; his plans had been frustrated; the young fighting cock had refused to compromise his honour, and his pride was crowing more lustily than ever: M. Christophe Trayaz had unmistakably lost in this stoutly fought game which he had felt so certain of winning. For twenty-four hours he was in such a furious rage that even Wasp, the only creature who had never had to complain of him, dared not approach him. The night that followed was a terrible one. Till dawn of day he paced his room, up and down, up and down, with occasionally long halts near an open window where he drank in the outer air, which was fresh and damp.

He took a chill, and next day felt very unwell. He was suffering from an ordinary cold, but every hour brought increased difficulty in breathing; and at intervals he fell a prey to sinister presentiments, vague apprehensions, which his reason struggled against in vain. What troubled him most was that he had just reached the age fatal to the Trayaz family; two months ago he had arrived at his sixty-

fourth year, and he was anxious to live longer than his father had done. Severe as he generally was to himself, he decided so keep his room, take care of himself and do all he could in self-defence. Sam begged him to return to the villa, and establish himself again in his old rooms. He refused, declaring he could not stand the removal, that he liked the Antonine, and that during the weeks he might be kept a prisoner he would have more amusement there than anywhere, since he could listen to the voice of the sea.

Though existence was a heavy burden on his shoulders, it was a burden he had never been tempted to lay down. And in the last few days life had grown more precious to him; he had a revenge to take, plans to put into execution. To leave this world after toiling there so long, and before having enjoyed the fruits of his toil, would be failure, to die upon a defeat would be disgrace. On the second day, he sent to Hyères for the doctor who had attended him through his influenza, and he sounded him without discovering any alarming symptom. Interrogated by the family before he left, all they could get out of him was that M. Trayaz was simply suffering from an ordinary catarrh, that there was nothing to be alarmed about in the invalid's state, but that it might lead to more serious things. This sentence which was delivered to Mme. de la Farlède and repeated by her to all the rest, made a great sensation. The servants who waited at lunch and at dinner remarked that never at any meal had the family looked so thoughtful and serious.

But the cold grew rapidly worse. The invalid was very restless, his temperature rose rapidly, the fever ran high, and his nights were very bad. He had to keep his bed; but could only sleep sitting straight up, supported by cushions, with his head bent forward and his arms stretched out. Following his instructions, a telegram was sent to one of the greatest practitioners in Paris, who arrived without delay, accompanied by his best pupil, M. Listel. After a most careful examination, he established the existence of a centre of congestion. Although he had the reputation of

being infallible in his prognostications, he said nothing about the imminence of danger. Would the danger be extended? There was everything to be feared. M. Trayaz's appeared one of those peculiar, complicated cases which upset every calculation, so that it is impossible to say of them if their state is favourable or unfavourable. He ordered him cupping on the back, blisters at his extremities, and injections of ether, and when he went away left his pupil at La Figuière, to follow out all his prescriptions.

M. Listel had recently qualified, and was a very learned and thoughtful young doctor, whose only defect was an air of seriousness that was very depressing: he did not believe that the art of consolation was a fundamental part of the science of medicine, and there was little comfort to be got out of his face. Rigidly taciturn, he only replied by monosyllables to all the questions that were poured upon him; but he did go so far as to admit that M. Trayaz's illness was a case of arterio-sclerosis, after which he relapsed into silence. This mysterious word made a great impression, and set all imaginations at work. An explanation of it was demanded of M. Lejail, who knew the names of every known malady and of two or three others he believed himself to possess, which were unknown to any one else. He informed the curious that arterio-sclerosis is a premature ageing of the blood vessels, that it is possible to keep a certain youthfulness of body, and to have an arterial system already worn out and useless. Was this a fatal condition? He would not say anything definite about that; but contented himself with remarking that men who despise precautions, and mock those who take them, ought for the sake of example, to die, all of them, before reaching old age; but that the police of this world being very imperfect, they sometimes escapè.

From the first, M. Trayaz refused to see any one; he only allowed in his room Wasp, Sam, and a sister of Notre-Dame-de-grâce, Sœur Eugénie, his nurse. As nothing escaped the general notice, it was remarked that M. Sucquier himself was not allowed inside, but had his orders sent out

to him. Wretched at not being allowed to go near him, his nephews and nieces and his sister were reduced to coming several times every morning and evening to enquire after him. What were the secret feelings of their hearts? There was not sufficient certainty as to his intentions for any one to dare to wish for his death; but they were very glad he was seriously ill, and wished he might be so for a long time. The opinion most in favour, to which even those who had longest dissented from it were beginning to be converted, was that he had intended to marry Mlle. Verlaque as soon as possible, and they held this unexpected illness nothing less than providential, since it had put an obstacle in the way of realising this fatal project. Huguette, in particular, who, to her cost, had had experience of her great-uncle's caprices, held it certain that this was one of the cases in which an adjournment is equivalent to renunciation.

"Oh, we can feel safe now," she said to her mother: "he is always changing his plans, and never has the same twice running. Even if he were cured in a fortnight, he would never marry his Ameline."

What confirmed her in her conviction was the evident unhappiness of her rival, whose melancholy looks seemed to be imploring the pity of Heaven, and to demand the charity of the kindly disposed.

"She may be stupid," thought Huguette, "she knows what she is about, though."

The vindictive girl had no idea that in these hours of depression, Ameline was only thinking of a young man who never came back to her, and had given her no sign of life; that she was continually saying to herself: "Where is he? What is he doing? If he loved me, he would be here." Every one was still kind to her, and treated her with great consideration: spite of Huguette, could any one say what might happen? Ameline was still a power to be conciliated. Mme. Lejail and her sister took more pains than ever to make her talk, to get out of her the secret of her sadness. She was impenetrable; having made one mis-

take, she had sworn not to make another. She would have given much to be able to get a quarter of an hour by M. Trayaz's bedside; she had questions to ask him, advice to beg for. Nothing could make her forget the memorable evening during which he had said so many profound things to her which she had vainly endeavoured to understand. She considered him a prodigious man, who knew everything, guessed everything, could do everything; and who not only read all hearts, but could do with hers as he willed. She thought him not only extraordinary but very good, and felt a great affection for him. So with all her being she hoped he might soon get well. That he might die was a thought that never came into her head. Was it possible that such a man as he was could die like you or me?

Dr. Listel, who dined with the family, growing more and more solemn and silent, it was to Sam and Sœur Eugénie they turned to obtain information. These privileged beings who were allowed to enter into the sanctuary had become important personages, with whom it was necessary to be on friendly terms. When any one said: "What did she say to you? How did he look?" it was those two who were meant, and they received numberless attentions: the general idea was that when a millionaire begins to lose his wits with weakness, any chance word may have its effect upon the decisions of his last hours. The valet and the sister had never been so fussed over. Sœur Eugénie suspected nothing: a perfect nurse, her limitations of intellect were soon discovered. The daughter of well-to-do farmer folk, she had been on the point of marrying; but a few days before the day fixed for the wedding, the bridegroom partook of some poisonous mushrooms, and died. Although this misfortune, which had caused her to retire from the world, and had decided her career, had happened twenty years ago, it was always present in her memory, and she believed that all troubles must more or less resemble hers, and that all the cruel catastrophes which afflict the human species are caused by mushrooms. Her psychology being of the simplest, it

was impossible for her to divine what was passing in minds more complicated than that of Sœur Eugénie. That any one should harrow his soul about the probabilities of an inheritance was an order of things quite beyond her comprehension. She was astonished at the obsequious attentions, the smiles and caresses lavished on her by Mme. Lejail and her sister; but she was grateful for them, and not to be behindhand, advised them always to be careful.

"You think you know whether they are eatable or poisonous," she said pathetically, "and then you are carried off."

Sam behaved very differently through it all, and took advantage of the situation to procure himself many delicious satisfactions for his amour-propre. His fatuousness was revealed in his manner and attitude, and he frequently passed his finger between his collar and neck, to give emphasis and value to his importance. With serious aspect, and very long face, he answered questioners in oracular tones, delighting as the case might be to alarm them, or reassure them. What rejoiced him most of all were the advances and politeness of a young lady for whom, as he had confessed to the innkeeper at Lavandon, he cherished an unfortunate affection. She paid him so much flattering attention, he began to indulge in all kinds of hopes, and this incorrigible maker of bets made a wager with John that he would win a kiss from the lady he dared to call his loved one. Having received by post a big box of preserved fruits from Casimir, which she opened before Sam, she allowed him to take one. He chose a fig, and found it delicious. Sam considered this act of graciousness an unworded declaration, and no longer repressed his audacious desires, but looked at Huguette now so languishingly and now so ardently that she regretted her fig and took care to keep him at a distance.

M. Trayaz was making a good fight. After some days' gradual improvement, not particularly well maintained, came a decided, steady recovery. His breathing was easier, his nights almost comfortable. M. Listel assured him, with his funereal air, that soon he would be able to go out.

"Yes, Doctor, to make the journey no one returns from!"

he replied, looking piercingly and questioningly into the eyes of the young patriarch.

But there was nothing to be read in the impassive face of Doctor Listel, who gave his patient leave to get up. He eagerly profited by the permission and spent hours in the old leather arm-chair, playing with his famous little knife, handling and turning in every direction that reliable little fetish which had succoured him in more than one difficulty. While his hands were thus occupied, his brain was working busily. The Antonine seemed to be a place favourable to the performance of doughty deeds; this strong willed man gave proof of it. Having got rid of Sœur Eugénie and Sam one afternoon, he spent it in committing to paper, decisions and reasons he had already written out in his head. It required a mighty effort, he had to put an immense strain upon himself, but his writing never once trembled; he broke into a profuse perspiration, breathed hard, groaned, had to have recourse to smelling salts; once and again the pen fell from his fingers. When he had done, he nearly lost consciousness; but he had accomplished what he wished. Sam announced to his visitors that Monsieur had spent half the day in writing, and imparted this news in such mysterious tones that the general agitation was great.

There are events so serious that we think of them every minute of the day, we eat them with our bread, drink them with our wine, and yet dare not speak of them. Every one talked of the most indifferent matters, the merest trifles, in excited tones; discussing cuisine, chiffons, with fevered looks. Next night Huguette dreamed that she had consented to let Sam kiss her, and he had introduced her into the sanctuary, where, after hunting round everywhere she discovered the precious paper, unfolded it, and found traced on it in letters of flame these words: "To console her for all I have made her undergo, I appoint my grand-niece Huguette Lejail my sole legatee." Her emotion caused her to wake with a start. It seemed to her the dream was a good omen: but, being a sensible girl, she told herself that if the will had been so short, the testator would not have been so

long about setting it down, and that, after all, dreams are only dreams, so she resigned herself with a good grace to much humbler expectations.

"I only ask for my million," thought this sage young lady: "I shall have it without being obliged to embrace Sam."

Some hours later M. Trayaz was visited by a thin, dried-up man who had a peculiar and very big wen on his right nostril. His name was M. Noudet, and he was the notary from Collobrière, the principal town of the canton to which belong the commune of Bormes and a villa celebrated for its fig-trees. M. Trayaz, who had often employed his services, thought a great deal of him: he liked him not only because he was a very clever lawyer, but because he was also one of the very few public officials whose words are worth gold, and who deserve confidence and esteem. He sent for him to read him the will he had written out with his own hand, to make sure the document was correct in form and in every way unimpeachable, to hand it over to his care, but above all to confide to him certain things he had never mentioned hitherto to any one. He made him take déjeuner with him in his room, and talked to him for a long time, hurriedly, breathlessly. At intervals, worn out with fatigue, he would pause for want of breath; the minute he had recovered from his exhaustion, he resumed his story. It astonished M. Noudet, who only left towards evening, carrying with him an urgent letter addressed by M. Trayaz to Mr. Brodley, who was to acquaint Mrs. Wheeler with its contents.

The great wen on his right nostril was not the most curious peculiarity offered by the countenance of M. Noudet. In his youth he had been struck by lightning, and the only trace left of the accident was a distortion of his mouth, which was twisted up towards his left ear; this gave his face an expression of equivocal hilarity, so that no one was ever sure if this really serious man were laughing or not. This slight deformity of his mouth had once nearly got him into a quarrel with a naval lieutenant, who accused him of laughing at

him; but an explanation settled matters, without necessity for a meeting. When M. Noudet left the villa in the open carriage which had brought him, all the guests of La Figuière were assembled to watch his departure, and as they had not seen him before that, they imagined he had smiled pleasantly at them all.

"He seemed to be saying to us: 'Lucky beggars!'" exclaimed M. de la Farlède, unable to contain himself.

Doctor Listel, whom no one could suspect of being subject to untimely mirth, after looking less serious for the last three days, had again grown exceedingly solemn: he had just noticed in the invalid a slight swelling of the feet and of the backs of the hands.

"Uremia has set in," he said one evening at the end of dinner.

For the second time M. Lejail was appealed to, and told them complacently that uremia is an invasion of the blood by the urea; that the features of this illness, which is often the last stage of arterio-sclerosis, are a slowly advancing œdema, increasing weakness, a very peculiar state of the brain, intermittent fits of delirium, with very persistent and distinct delusions, so that the invalid has a horror of the night, knowing that the long hours of darkness which seem so interminable will bring no respite to his anguish.

"He may get over it," the doctor had charitably added, in pronouncing his sentence. Sam said on the contrary to whoever would listen: "It is all up with him, he can't hold out much longer." And they all believed him.

M. Trayaz had no illusions about his state; he realised the dangerous nature of his illness; that if the swelling did not disappear, he was a dead man, and the swellings increased from day to day. His irritability increased with his weakness; he grew terrible to those who had the care of him. He controlled himself in presence of M. Listel: the silent young man awed him. But as soon as the doctor was out of the way, he vehemently declared that the milk diet they had put him on was killing him, that his blood was being impoverished, that he was hungry and wanted something

to eat, and he grew indignant at his nurse's refusals. He also accused Sœur Eugénie of not giving him his medicines regularly; she had long arguments with him, to convince him that he had taken them. In his delirium he lost all idea of time and place.

One night they heard him shout: "If they try to force an entrance into the gallery, shoot them down!" He thought he was in his mine fighting with the dead. Often he imagined he had been taken back to the villa: they had unheard-of difficulty in persuading him he had not left the Antonine. In his lucid intervals, his recollections were so precise, his ideas so exact, his reasoning so clear, that Sam accused him of "amusing himself with pretending light-headedness out of sheer cussedness," in which Sam was absolutely unjust. His dog had a more correct appreciation of the situation; he guessed that there are weaknesses and follies allowable to men in extremity. Contrary to his usual custom, M. Trayaz treated him brutally: he took it all patiently and licked the hand that dealt him blows.

"Wasp," the terrible man said to him, "you have one unpardonable fault; you have never bitten any one."

Suddenly he took a fancy for seeing again the members of his family, to whom his door had hitherto been so inexorably closed. To prolong that pleasure he made them all defile through his room separately, one by one. Seated in the black arm-chair, his feet swathed in flannel, with drawn lips and contracted brow, his thick eyebrows bristling, his eyes hard and gleaming as a wolf's, he had a hard word ready for each as they appeared.

He said to his sister: "Aren't you ashamed of your embassy to M. de Coulevreux? Think what a fine thing you did! taking the bread out of the mouth of a poor nephew! It's not a memory you'll care to take to Paradise. But you are all such mean creatures, I've only got to show you my violin, and you begin to dance at once."

He said to M. Lejail, who shivered at his words:

"My dear fellow, you are a man of sense. When then will you understand that a well-made tomb is the only

place where there are no draughts? In your place I should make haste to get into one."

To M. de la Farlède: "Why are you so long, Baron Bourdigue, about renouncing your little vanities? Listen to the solemn voice of the sea. How it despises us, you and me, but you especially with your tinsel marquises and cardboard countesses!"

To Mme. Lejail: "You think you are very clever, Mélanie, but you flatter yourself: you can never hide your game. Blandine managed to make me believe one day that she loved me sincerely."

To Mme. de la Farlède: "I have a weakness for you because you know how to make believe. I should like you more if you had quarrelled with your husband. You are a timid and very incomplete sinner."

To Jules: "You have solved, my boy, a problem for which I thought there was no solution: you are almost as stupid as you look . . . . Hide your ugly tongue, or I'll cut it off."

To Huguette: "A pretty face isn't everything. Mlle. Verlaque, for whom you have so little love, will not be long before she begins to grow fat, and then she'll look like a stuffed goose. You, *ma petite*, will grow so thin, your bones will come through your skin; your destiny is to wither alive, and grow like this."

He showed her one of the blades of his knife. Ameline came last.

"How dare you come into this room, mademoiselle? . . . Have you any news of him? . . . He's a wise youth, and has never taken you seriously! Did any one suppose I was counting on you to attract him hither? Little fool, what earthly good could you be to me? Does one go over a stream on a rotten plank?"

Every one left him in a state of consternation. No one was anxious to impart to any one else the ugly compliments they had received, but their long faces showed no one had been spared.

"I am certain," said M. Lejail to Huguette, "that each one

of us has had a home-thrust from him, I am equally certain it is all we shall ever get."

M. de la Farlède was furious. He declared to his wife he should lose all dignity if he remained another hour in a hateful house where there was no respect for anything, that he meant to leave it, and would leave at once. So he said, but he did not leave. They all continued, from habit and for the look of the thing, to visit the chalet several times every day to ask for news; but no one stayed now to talk to Sœur Eugénie and Sam. What was the use? The will was drawn up and signed, there was nothing now to be got from the attendants' good offices. Their importance had singularly diminished, they had returned to their former nothingness. Absorbed by her professional cares, Sœur Eugénie never perceived she was being neglected. Sam was enraged by such treatment. Huguette's lofty airs exasperated him; he rolled his eyes or muttered between his teeth: "Little minx!"

But the downfall most visible to the naked eye, and most deserving of pity, was that of a young girl who had been generally believed called to great good fortune, but whom they had seen coming out of the painter's house with unhappy face, and eyes swimming with tears. They could not forgive themselves for having been mistaken about her, for having feared and courted her, for having lavished on such an insignificant creature so many words and attentions. As if to reimburse themselves for useless expenditure, they treated her with very scant civility, and hardly spoke to her at all. M. Sucquier who imputed to her his disgrace, looked askance at her; Virginie continually reproached her for having spoiled by her gaucherie the most splendid plan of campaign; she told her endless stories of marriages *in extremis*, winding up by saying:

"To-day you would be his wife, and to-morrow his widow. What a position! Was ever such an opportunity lost before?"

But that was not what was distressing Ameline most. She had learnt from the great wizard that Silvère loved her

no longer, and never had loved her perhaps: could she doubt her unhappiness? The slights put upon her for which she knew no cause, Mme. Lejail's disdain, Mme. de la Farlède's coolness, M. Sucquier's mute objurgations added to her miseries. She wrote every day lamentable letters to her mother, asking her to take pity on her and send for her or fetch her.

Then they suddenly learnt from Sœur Eugénie that a strange and miraculous change had taken place in M. Trayaz's temper and behaviour, that this savage, whimsical invalid had unexpectedly become a very gentle patient. Not long before he had made a regular scene because she had ventured to approach and tell him he had had a two hours' sleep; he replied angrily that he had never closed his eyes and called her an idiot; she never approached him without fear and trembling. One morning he called to her in tones that were almost friendly, made her sit down beside him, and said:

"I don't know if I have been asleep, *ma sœur*, but come and talk to me."

He confessed to her that he had been the most stupid, most foolish of men; that no one has a right to resent death, unless he has reasons for regretting life: that he could see nothing he need regret leaving in his; that after toiling and tormenting himself and wearing himself out to amass a big fortune, he had not known what to do with it; that since his return to Europe he had been a prey to the most remorseless disease, the spleen of riches; that he had never known the happiness riches can give except in his dreams; that all is vanity under the sun, that he cared for nothing, everything was indifferent to him; that he had now only one desire, to be gone quickly and find out for himself if in the other world there were any place where one can rest without being bored. She was sure, though, that in his state of indifference there was still something he cared about, for twice he said to her:

"You'll see, they'll arrive too late."

She asked him to explain, but he would not. She took

advantage of this improvement, in which she recognised the finger of God, to beg him to listen to his conscience, and send for the priest. He consented with very good grace, and edified the curé from Bormes by his resignation. Sam, who was a heretic, was not to be taken in, and said to John the coachman:

"I would bet five hundred dollars the devil loses nothing by that, that when he dies, old Harry will get him."

"Who's old Harry?" asked John.

"Old Nick, of course."

Next day, M. Trayaz received another visit from his lawyer. He recovered all his faculties, all his presence of mind, to give him detailed instructions concerning his funeral and the reading of the will. After repeating to him his last instructions, and saying farewell to him, he testified a desire to see his family once again. It cost his nephews and nieces not a little to obey his invitation; though Sœur Eugénie tried to reassure them, they expected to experience further rebuffs. Mme. de la Farlède was very anxious; she was afraid lest what had been said to her in private might be repeated in her husband's presence.

They hardly recognised him, so much had his illness changed him. The thin, lean little man had grown curiously stout; his face was swollen, so were his lips and eyelids. His mind seemed to them as much changed as his body; to their agreeable surprise, he had a kind word for every one. He said to Huguette, stroking her chin:

"As pretty as ever, *ma petite!*"

"As far as that's possible to any one who resembles your little pocket-knife," she replied in a tone of gracious coquetry.

"Naughty child! You must forgive a man everything when he is dying."

She felt as much touched, as sincerely moved, as it was in her nature to be. She kissed his brow, exclaiming:

"You are not going to die. I won't let you."

He shook his head, and looked at them all with mourn-

ful eyes: "Could I leave this world without thanking you all for your affectionate attention to your old uncle? You have loved him, petted him."

He went on: "Do you remember our evening at Lavandon? What a delightful evening we had! You will be pleased with me, *mes enfants.* I told you one day I was the honey, you were the flies. The honey is made to be eaten by the flies. All I ask of you is to think of me when you eat it. But I should have given it to you sooner: I am like the man who gave his plums to the curé because his pig would not eat them."

Then, turning towards Ameline, who stood in the background, he signed to her to approach, and whispered in her ear:

"No need to despair: the most tangled business can be got straight sometimes . . . I have made it all right for you."

She bent her head humbly, her eyes full of tears. Those who resented having abased themselves so long before her did not guess that she was crying for joy. Convinced that she alone had been excluded from the plenary indulgence, that she would have no part in the eternal beatitude, nothing was wanting to complete their contentment.

This second interview so efficaciously repaired the disastrous effect produced by the first, that all who were present seemed deeply touched. They had hardly left the dying man when Mme. Lejail and Mme. de la Farlède who did not often weep, and never kissed each other, fell sobbing into each other's arms. Great emotions have a transforming effect on character; perhaps too they were anxious to ensure their happiness in the future by their right feeling at this juncture. "You will be pleased with me . . . Think of me when you are eating your honey." These words excited and roused the imagination of the flies, and made them begin to buzz. There was now nothing to fear, and they could hope everything. In all good faith, ought they to wish to prolong an existence which was now only a

long drawn-out agony? If it had only been necessary to touch a button to kill this mandarin, M. Trayaz would probably have died that evening.

He lingered for several days. Doctor Listel, when urgently questioned, informed them that if the dropsy increased and the cerebral condition remained as it was, the invalid might obtain an indefinite respite; but that to judge from appearances, he would be carried off suddenly by convulsive uræmia. M. Trayaz justified his prognostications. One afternoon he was seized with convulsions. His teeth chattered; his breathing grew feebler and feebler; his temperature gradually sank lower and lower, and by degrees he lost all warmth. To satisfy his conscience, M. Listel bled him, but it was useless. For a day and a night he alternated between attacks of trembling in all his limbs and comatose sleep. The death agony was short; but he could do nothing like anybody else. They thought it was all over, when, about four o'clock in the morning he regained consciousness. He turned his head and looked with lifeless eyes at Sœur Eugénie; then collecting all the strength and the breath he had left, he asked her in an almost inaudible voice if she thought that up above they knew all that was going on down here.

"Yes, I am certain," she replied in tones of pious conviction. He looked his thanks and fell asleep. She declared that at this moment the dying man's face wore an expression of angelic sweetness. Sam, on the contrary, pretended he saw him sneer. Dr. Listel, we may well believe, took good care not to intervene in this quarrel.

In a few minutes everything was over. The sea, which was very rough and stormy, had beaten furiously all night against the little granite beach: it was splashing the balcony of the Antonine with its foam, when a man who had never been mediocre either in good or evil gave up the ghost, yielding up with life his millions and his ennui, all the portion he had never been able to digest.

Huguette, who was a light sleeper, had risen early to go and make enquiries; she hastened to return and carry back

the great news. Each hurried off to offer his services to Sœur Eugénie, who refused them: M. Trayaz had notified to her his express wish that she and Sam should do for him all the last services, and that he should be watched by them only. All that day every one was very grave, almost gloomy. The women said continually, with an air of compunction, "Poor dear uncle!" There was no talk but of his good days, his kindliest caprices, his cheerfulness, his presents, and above all the cordial adieux he had addressed to his family. To tell the truth, the only person who really grieved was Ameline. At first she had quite refused to believe in his death, which upset all her ideas about extraordinary men, whom death has no right to attack. At last she had to give in; and she cried bitterly. Her only consolation was in frequent repetition to herself of certain words the dead man had murmured in her ear: "There are bad businesses which can be arranged . . . . I have made it all right." This memory cheered her so much that though she sincerely grieved for him, at times she even smiled in her woe.

In the evening, while, in her room alone with Virginie, who made fun of her, she tried to explain all her confused feelings, whose complication alarmed her, the rest of the family were taking tea in the Red Drawing Room. For a long time conversation was very grave and unctuous; the assembled company chanted a mournful refrain to an air suited to the subject. It was M. de la Farlède who broke the charm. As he was preparing his second glass of grog, he suddenly exclaimed:

"I have reckoned it all out. We may take it for granted M. Trayaz was worth eighty millions."

"How do you know that?" asked M. Lejail.

"Why, I got it from M. Sucquier, to be sure. I was talking to him for a long time this afternoon, and I don't imagine, my dear brother-in-law, you will dispute his authority, though you do dispute most things. He told me positively that when M. Trayaz first returned to Europe, he possessed a fortune of sixty millions, invested in real estate

in France and in America, and that reckoning some recent speculations of his, and what he saved out of his yearly income and interests, this fortune has been increased by a quarter if its value at the very lowest. M. Sucquier thinks too that it was his intention to devote a portion of it to the founding of a university for the Yankees, but to leave the rest to his family. Let us be generous, and do things on a liberal scale, let us give forty millions to his university, there remain forty millions for ourselves. You will willingly grant me that Casimir and the ex-gardener are quite out of the running. According to his agent, finding us all equally amiable and worthy of his interest, M. Trayaz had given up the idea of favouring any one of us. We are henceforth three co-heirs, our mother-in-law, you and I. The third of forty is thirteen or nothing at all. I am content with my share, I declare myself satisfied. What answer can you make to that, eternal caviller?"

"I reply in the first place," answered M. Lejail, "that the university of Chicago cost more than a hundred millions. In the second place I should like to know what commission M. Sucquier expects for his liberality."

"Aren't you ashamed, Lejail?" retorted M. de la Farlède opening his nostrils, and rearing his crest. "How can you joke on a day like this? Do you forget that the man to whom we owe so much died this morning? I wear mourning for him in my heart, and have not, like you, any inclination to laugh; although he was very disagreeable sometimes, his memory will always be dear to me."

"I am quite agreeable! But do tell me, what's to come of Sal in all your calculations?"

"Sal! Who is Sal?"

"Don't you remember Sal, the American girl poor Casimir told us of one evening, of whom M. Trayaz had said that her little finger was worth more than the whole of Mlle. Verlaque's person? Believe me, however devoted you may be to the dead man's memory, beware of Sal!"

A regular outcry reached the incorrigible pessimist from every corner of the drawing-room; he was accused of de-

lighting to calumniate the dead and torment the living. He had to bend his back, and stop his ears; with bowed head, he let the storm burst and pass over him. Huguette said never a word. She did not believe in Sal; she suspected Casimir, who was given to romancing, of having invented the American girl. Besides, she was secretly persuaded that after a fortunate revulsion of feeling, M. Trayaz had restored Mlle. Huguette Lejail to favour, and that she herself would be principal heiress. She had not settled any precise sum, but she was sure of her case.

When M. Lejail had had his share of reprobation, it was M. de la Farlède's turn for his calculations to be pulled to pieces. With his own consent he was found too generous to the Yankees; every quarter of an hour a little more was pared off from the university to be handed over to the family; by the end of the evening it had nothing left, everything had been taken from it. If millions bring spleen to those who possess them, they sometimes intoxicate those who do not. Every one felt a prosperous wind blowing over his head: they were no longer wishing, but in possession.

Their conversation, which had grown very eager, was interrupted by mournful howlings. Sœur Eugénie had expelled Wasp from the chamber of death, into which he persisted in making his way, and had sent him up to the villa in care of Sam, who had just tied him up. His lamentable howling caused a secret feeling of uneasiness to all these reckoners of gold and silver. They separated and went to bed; but their slumbers were disturbed by the same noise, and till morning they cursed the troublesome animal that did not cease to call upon Death, who has never yet given up anything, to give him back his master.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER his night spent in wandering about on the mountain, Silvère Sauvagin returned to Hyères, but he did not stay there. He left again at once, with his map and his metal box, his knapsack on his back, his trowel in his hand. He spent three whole weeks botanising on the Maures Mountain, visiting in turn the valleys parallel to the mountain chains, and those which intersect them, investigating the bushes, sounding the marshes, following the course of streams, losing himself in the woods, rising with the sun, and thankful for any kind of dinner or bed that offered itself. He was intent on two things. He was seeking certain rare plants which were lacking in his collection, or of which he had only insufficient specimens, and at the same time he was struggling to escape from memories which haunted him, pursued him like a fugitive. Whether he climbed an ascent bordered with jujube trees and terebinths, or plunged down into ravines sheltered by myrtles and laurels, or whether at night, worn out and exhausted with his day's work, he sought a lodging in some rustic inn, or begged the hospitality of a peasant, he said to men as to plants: "Don't speak to me of her: Let me forget her eyes, her hair, the amber tints of her cheeks, the delicious, lingering tones of her silvery voice." He sought forgetfulness, which of all rare blossoms is the most difficult to find. Still, if he did nothing else, he wore out his grief; his long tramps procured him healthy oblivion and nights of dreamless sleep. He no longer met her in his slumbers; but hardly had he opened his eyes when he saw her again, and she was again speaking to him. She accused him in mournful tones of being too hard on her: was it her fault if she was easily convinced, if she took every one's advice, and sometimes that advice was harmful? He would not accept her excuses, he replied to her: "The old man was right when he said that I would never marry a girl who has no conscience of her own."

He had adopted a wise régime; he was not forgetting, but by degrees he was gaining calmness. One evening in the neighbourhood of Collobrières he met the magistrate of the district, who had been a great friend of his father's. This magnate invited Silvère to come and stay some time with him, and Silvère accepted his invitation. The magistrate told him M. Trayaz was seriously ill, and two days later M. Noudet came to visit his friend and informed him the millionaire was dead. The news made a great impression on Silvère:

His feelings toward him were of a very contradictory nature: he could have said of him:

> "Il m'a fait trop de bien pour en dire du mal.
> Il m'a fait trop de mal pour en dire du bien."

"I forgive you," he thought, "may God forgive you too!"

But his brows contracted when the solicitor told him that he, as well as his cousin Casimir, was included in the list of persons specially desired by his uncle to be present at the reading of the will, which was to take place in the painter's house two hours after the funeral.

"M. Trayaz was truly tenacious in his malice," he exclaimed. "If he thought he was going to inflict on me one more mortification, he made a mistake. To be disappointed in one's hopes, one must have hopes, and I have none. With Casimir it's different. He has the kind of imagination that could get oil out of a stone. All the same, he might have spared me this."

The twisted mouth of M. Noudet seemed to be answering him with a smile, but, not being a naval lieutenant, Silvère did not ask for an explanation.

The Trayaz possessed in the cemetery at Bormes a modest family vault. It was there that the only one of their number who had ever made any stir in the world wished to enjoy, among the bones of his ancestors, the delights of a repose not marred by ennui. Silvère arrived as the procession was being formed. He was invited to take a seat in one of the

carriages reserved for the family, in which Casimir, who had eagerly hastened to the ceremony, had already taken his place. The millionaire's funeral had attracted a crowd of sight seers. Like Ameline, most of them were astonished that an illness of so short duration should have carried off like any ordinary mortal a man so rich, so powerful, and so proud. They spoke of him as a phenomenon: but even among those who admired him the most, there was not one who had given him a little corner of his heart. They did him the justice to acknowledge he had been open-handed and generous, but they remembered he had been hard and morose of speech; that if he did not refuse anything that was asked of him, he browbeat those who asked: his savage beneficence, his dismal, ungracious charity were like a northern landscape untouched by sunshine.

The mistral was blowing that day in squalls, and it was not warm. M. Lejail suspected the dead man had ordered it so on his special behalf: it was wilful murder, and he warned his wife he should not survive this expedition. Silvère thought that this rough, boisterous weather was well suited to the occasion, that the mistral is a keen, bitter wind, but that it purifies.

"This man," he said to himself, "has robbed my life of all that made its charm; perhaps he has made it more healthful. Sleepy, stagnant water exhales miasma; there is a secret corruption in a slothful happiness."

The ceremony was short: M. Trayaz had decided that only a low mass should be said over him, and that there should be no sermon at the grave. Every one was talking, but in low tones: there are dead men whom the living fear. There was a moment of universal silence when the hollow sound was heard of the earth falling on the coffin, while a blackbird's cheerful note rang out from a cypress near by, and from far away in the valley came the long, lugubrious howling of an inconsolable dog. Dogs were created so that in this world of vain contentions, there may be one creature capable of loving with the divine animal love, that does not judge the object of its affections.

On their return a sumptuous collation was ready for all those who were to be present at the reading of the will, including the municipal officials of several neighbouring communes. When he entered the dining-room Silvère found himself face to face with Ameline and her mother; he started, made a plunge and got away from them. A few minutes later, having accidentally looked her way, he saw that the girl was gazing at him, and that there was a mute supplication in her eyes. She did not attempt to speak to him. She was again under the maternal control, and Mme. Verlaque did nothing rashly; she acted according to the state of times and seasons: trim your sails according to the wind and weather, was her great and invariable principle, and before deciding what her conduct to Silvère was to be, she was waiting for reliable information, which she would not be long now in receiving.

The hour had struck. For some time now, the youth of Lavandon had been assembled on the crest of the little cliff which forms one boundary of La Figuière and shelters the Antonine on the north. Boys and girls were curiously watching this chalet where more than one destiny was to be decided, and whence some would issue with hearts full of joy, others with the bitterness of death in their souls. It was in vain that the waves, whipped up by the mistral, advanced sometimes even to the feet of these bystanders, or scattered foam over their faces; they dried themselves and stood firm. To the end of all time, everyone will delight to watch a wall behind which something is happening.

The interested parties arrived singly or in little groups. Without saying a word to each other, they were all trying to compose their faces, their attitudes. They affected indifference; but their emotion was evident from their eager eyes, their feverish agitation, the little spasmodic movements which contracted or dilated their lips. Mme. Limiès, whose thoughts were always for others, experienced a secret anxiety like that of a hen wondering if its chicks will have enough grain. Mme. Lejail was very pale and as rigid to

all appearances as a rod of iron, but in reality she was vibrating like a violin string. Mme. de la Farlède was very red, and though the heat had abated fanned herself ceaselessly with her handkerchief. Jules was hanging round her, explaining to her in a low voice a splendid idea he had got: he meant to write his name in big letters on the poop and prow of his yacht, so that no one could take it from him. Casimir was twirling his moustache and his legs were restless; he walked up and down, never, however, taking his eyes off Huguette: "If that old man," he said to himself, "has forgiven me my offences, this pretty blonde will before long be one of my goods and chattels." The pretty blonde took no notice of him; she took no notice of anything nor anybody; but her eyes fixed on space, was communing with herself. She felt less sure of her good fortune than the day before, and from time to time was seized with little shivers of doubt and alarm.

More puffed out than ever, swelling with importance, M. de la Farlède was quivering too, but only with impatience. He had verified his calculations, and found them unimpeachable: a feeling of triumphant certainty is the privilege of fools. He was already in possession of his millions, disposing of them; he was buying the seignorial château and the big estates he had so often coveted; he was transforming his household arrangement, trebling the number of his servants. The only question that troubled him was the livery he should give to his grooms; he was hesitating between knickerbockers of nut brown kerseymere, and black trousers with a stripe. Why not buck-skin knickerbockers? The ex-préfet had a less perturbed mind. He kept his old suspicions, well founded or not, and they did not disturb him. He had, contrary to his expectations, come back alive from the cemetery: this seemed to him so great a gain, that he felt he might be easy about secondary matters, now the main thing was assured. Of course nothing could be more delightful than to inherit property; but pessimists have one advantage over other folk; when things go wrong they are always proved to be in the right. He could laugh at wife

and brother-in-law, amuse himself at their expense, and cry "Oh, how you have been duped!" Living at Le Dattier, he had no need for a big income, and the pleasures of a rather malicious prophet had greater value there than elsewhere.

M. Sucquier appeared; he was livid and frowning. After him came Mme. Verlaque, followed by her daughter. Of all the women who were present, the little plump lady from Hyères was the only one strong-minded enough to keep entire self-control, to wear a set face, and dispose as she wished of her extensor and flexor muscles. Her daughter had lost all self-command; as pale as Mme. Lejail, she was saying to herself continually: "Why is he so angry with me, seeing that he knows nothing?" The young man she was thinking of arrived too before long; and by the way he walked across this room he knew only too well, and looked gloomily round its walls, this *ingénue* sinner should have guessed that he knew everything.

The studio of the old painter, of which M. Trayas had made his work-room and bed-room, was a great chamber, oblong in shape. The furniture had been removed, and for this occasion replaced by several rows of seats, facing a little platform with a table on which were a serge cloth and a glass of water. M. Noudet was standing near the window, and occasionally looking at his watch. M. de la Farlède went up to him.

"Well, sir," he said, "what are we waiting for? It seems to me, we are all here."

"One moment! a little patience!" replied the lawer. "I have just received a telegram . . . ."

He was outside the door before his sentence was finished.

"Who can he be getting telegrams from?" asked M. de la Farlède of his brother-in-law.

"Who knows?" replied M. Lejail. "Perhaps he is in telegraphic communication with the dead man."

"My dear fellow, when will you stop making unseasonable jokes?" answered M. de la Farlède.

He allowed that jokes were admissible sometimes, but not all jokes at all times. He added: "I don't half like that

man's face. If I may venture to say so, our uncle would have shown more consideration for his family if he had had his last wishes conveyed to us by a notary whose mouth was not all awry."

Thereupon some maintained that M. Noudet was always laughing, others that he never laughed. This discussion served to pass time.

Suddenly the door opened, and M. Noudet reappeared. To the astonishment of every one he was accompanied by three strange ladies; a mother and her two daughters. The mother was of no particular age; her daughters, who had just attained their majority, were so much alike that it was necessary to look closely at both, to distinguish one from the other. They were in travelling costume; their little winged toques were showing signs of travel, and their skirts were dusty. They had come from America; and had travelled express from Calais to Toulon. They had been invited to pay a visit to La Figuière and had arranged to arrive by the end of May; a letter Mr. Brodley had received had obliged them to hasten their departure. Although they had made all possible speed, they had not been able to arrive in time for M. Trayaz's last moments, or even for his funeral. Their passage had been delayed by bad weather, they arrived forty-eight hours late, but they had arrived at last, and forewarned by their telegram, M. Noudet had decided to wait for them. Polite as he was to every one, he seemed to show them a quite special deference. He carefully placed them in the best arm-chairs in the front row; then, addressing himself to the members of the family, he told them he was going to open the will.

"Pray explain to us first though," said M. de la Farlède rudely, "what these three intruders are doing in here!"

Raising his voice so that it might be heard in every corner of the room:

"Monsieur," he replied, "these three intruders are the widow of the late M. Christophe Trayaz, and their twin daughters, Miss Meg and Miss Sally Trayaz."

A thunderbolt had fallen amongst them: a cry rose from

every mouth. The bachelor was married, and he had two daughters! What treachery! after the first outcry, a mournful stupor fell upon all. Though no one said a word, all loaded the dead man with curses and insults, reproaching him for his outrageous perfidy. They thought him more guilty than he really had been; occasion had made him do a thing he had never dreamed of doing. It was not his fault that on his return the previous year to the United States, when he saw once more the twin daughters borne to him by the widow of his best friend, he had been so charmed with them that the idea of having them with him had overcome the antipathy that had grown up in him for their mother, and he had resolved to inform his relations of his secret marriage in this very month of May. "You offer me of your own accord," she had said to him, "what you have always refused me." The three American ladies looked perfectly innocent. They did not appear to suspect that they were a public calamity, one of those scourges sent to man by the God of vengeance and of judgment; that the havoc wrought by their sudden appearance in all these minds so suddenly disappointed in their hopes was comparable only to the ravages effected by hail in a vineyard or by an invasion of locusts in harvest-time. They had seated themselves in the chairs offered them by M. Noudet, and calm, placid, and impassive seemed to be quite remote from all that was passing around them. The looks of hate directed against them did not in the least trouble the serenity of their consciences; they possessed that faculty for isolation which is as characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race as of water spiders. Sam, who had had the honour of being admitted to the assembly, was enjoying this spectacle: he found it most amusing, and reflecting on the unexpectedness of the vicissitudes of human affairs, was once more registering a vain oath he would never make a wager again about anything. Silvère was indifferent, but surprised, and remembered what his uncle had one day said to him: "I am in a Jack-in-the-box; I love startling people." So he had been all his life, and continued to exercise his talent after his death.

One man, though, nearly died of this *coup de théâtre* that Sam found so amusing: this was M. de la Farlède. He grew crimson, and his wife feared he would have a fit. "That notary is lying!" he stammered, and for some seconds remained voiceless, pulseless, a lifeless heap on his chair. They wanted to offer him smelling salts, he signed to them to leave him alone. When he came to himself, he perceived that the notary, who had *not* been lying, had begun to read, and he heard that M. Trayaz had left two executors, one of whom, it seemed to him, was called Mr. Brodley. What did it matter? He thought also that he heard that the whole of this royal property was equally divided between Miss Meg and Miss Sally Trayaz, who were charged with the payment to their mother if she did not marry again, of two hundred thousand francs a year till the day of her death.

By this time he had acquired that insensibility to blows which concentrated rage can give. But still he felt a faint hope again springing up in him. Though the buzzing in his ears that had followed on his cerebral disturbance did not allow him to catch quite all that M. Noudet was saying, he argued from certain explanations, which seemed to him very complicated, that there was still twenty millions more to dispose of. That was enough to make a family happy. But, alas! how many there were to divide it among! M. Trayaz did not leave a penny to M. Sucquier, but he left important legacies to several communes of the neighbourhood, to his farmers, his servants, Sam at the head of them, and magnificent bequests to several charitable institutions in France and America. He left Mr. Brodley, as a mark of his affection and gratitude, the modest sum of one hundred thousand dollars, "not daring," he said, "to offer him more, for fear of troubling his peace of mind."

"You'll see we shall not have a penny," M. de la Farlède said to his wife with a despairing smile.

He was mistaken. M. Trayaz left two hundred thousand francs to his sister, Mme. Limiès, the same to each of his nieces, to his grand-niece Huguette, his grand-nephew Jules,

and his nephew Casimir. His nephews by marriage were not mentioned. At this moment a little stifled cry proved that the philosophical Casimir had just experienced an agreeable surprise.

"I bequeath my property of La Figuière, with all its appurtenances and dependences . . ." There M. Noudet paused, something had got into his throat. M. de la Farlède half sat up: even in his despair, this optimist's hopefulness could not be entirely eradicated.

"Now's my turn perhaps," he thought. "I should not have been in such a hurry to judge him; he would of course leave La Figuière to an agriculturist decorated with the order of merit."

"I leave my property of La Figuière," went on M. Noudet, "with all its appurtenances and dependences, to my nephew . . ."

M. de la Farlède sat up quite straight this time.

"To my nephew . . . Silvère Sauvagin."

M. Noudet was seized with another fit of coughing; he had to stop again and drink a glass of water. Silvère was so startled he suddenly roused from his torpor; but his eyes expressed anger rather than delight.

"I know him," he said to himself: "There'll be a condition attached, and it will be impossible to accept it."

"To my nephew Silvère Sauvagin, on the express condition that he marries Mlle. Ameline Verlaque within three months. Should he refuse to conform to this condition I mean La Figuière to revert to my daughter Sally, who will look after it well, and spend much of her time there. To facilitate the voyages this will necessitate, I leave her my yacht."

Jules did not move; with his tongue out, he had been sleeping for some moments like a top. The three American ladies soon left to go to the cemetery, and ask forgiveness of the dead man, because they had not been able to receive his last sigh, or attend his funeral. On the way Sal explained to her mother and sister, who did not know a word of French, the principal clauses of the will. Meg seemed

satisfied; Mme. Trayaz was less so. She preferred capital to an income, and objected to prohibitory clauses.

"Well, my dear Hector," said M. Lejail to his brother-in-law, "was I right in being afraid of Sal?"

M. de la Farlède had no longer the complexion or the manner of a man on the verge of apoplexy, he was as yellow as a guinea, and behaved as though he were possessed. What added to his rage was that the fatal sentence had been conveyed to him by a solicitor who, he persisted in believing, jeered at him. He apostrophised him violently, abused him, shouting at him sometimes that the marriage was no marriage, sometimes that the will was worth nothing, and that he would try to upset it. To which M. Noudet politely replied:

"I am at your disposal; be so good as to come to my rooms, and we will go through it all together, you shall see the documents."

His wife who hated too see the spectacle he was making of himself, carried him off. All along the avenue and even to the threshold of the villa, which he was eager to leave, and shake the dust thereof from his shoes, he poured forth his rage, declaiming tragically against the dead man, whom he denounced as the meanest, most despicable of men. Fields and orchards re-echoed to the sound of his voice.

"Well, really, your uncle Hector is a wonderful fellow," said Casimir to Huguette, whom he had succeeded in catching up, and by whose side he was walking. "If any one had told him five years ago that his wife and his son would in one day inherit four hundred thousand francs, he would have blessed his good fortune. That's what comes of getting ideas into one's head; of playing with big figures: it's a game that grown-up folk should be forbidden to play at, as we forbid children to play with matches. He has set fire to his brain, it's burning still, and will never go out. Of course as far as I am concerned, if my uncle had thought well to leave me the million he almost promised me at Lavandon, that wouldn't have disturbed my peace of mind, which is less easily troubled than that of Mr. Brodley. But we must

be reasonable. His two hundred thousand francs will double my little fortune, which I lay now at your feet. If you do me the honour of marrying me, you will add to it your two hundred thousand. Mme. Limiès will give you the half of hers; that means seven hundred thousand, and by one legacy and another we shall still be millionaires one day. My dear little cousin, I adore you: give yourself to me, to me altogether. *Dieu!* how we shall amuse ourselves!"

And he devoured her with his eyes. She had just had a great disappointment. But as Sam said, she had nerve, and as her father said, she was like a cat that can fall from an upper story without breaking a limb, and jump up and run away.

She came to the conclusion that Casimir could be sensible sometimes.

"*Mon cousin*," she replied, "there's some truth in what you say. Come to Le Dattier one of these days, and tell me again . . . perhaps I shall believe you at last . . . But let's talk of Silvère!"

"Ah, yes, let's talk of Silvère," said Casimir. "There are some happinesses one is not proud of, and morsels which stick in the throat, but one manages to swallow them . . . a fine theme for verses!"

While they were thus talking together, the subject of their remarks had gone down to the beach. Seated at the foot of a pine tree, his arms crossed, his face beaten by the wind, he watched the foaming, billowy sea, which seemed to him to portray the state of his mind. Though he was not yellow like M. de la Farlède, nor raving like a maniac, he also was apostrophising the dead man. He did not call him a wretch, he was saying to him:

"You were the most cruel and ingenious of tyrants. Incapable of happiness yourself, you would not have any one else happy. You spent the last year of your life in tormenting me, and you torment me still from the tomb."

He had thought to return that very day to Collobrières; but now it was too late, and he decided to spend the night at the inn in Lavandon. First of all, though, he meant to

see his property. He left the pinewood he was in, climbed a hillock, from the top of which he surveyed the magnificent domain, which had been given to him that he might choose between the shame of keeping it, and the grief of renunciation. What tortured him most was, not that he had to renounce possession of this kingdom, these vines and forests, plains and mountains, but the thought of the joy it would have been to him once, to offer his inheritance to a certain girl without a conscience, if he had not one evening . . . . The thought of it made his blood boil.

He caught sight of M. Sucquier who was at the end of the avenue, either waiting for him, or seeking him perhaps. Silvère advanced towards him, and when there was only a distance of twenty or thirty yards between them:

"Monsieur Sucquier," he called out, "don't look so upset! We must be brave in our misfortunes, fortune has its reverses . . . . Oh, stay where you are: I would prefer that we should converse at a distance . . . . M. Sucquier, please tell me, how much did La Figuière bring in last year?"

"Farms, forest and vines, it brought in about one hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"A pretty figure, *ma foi!* and mainly due to you. I should be mad to lose the services of such a clever agent . . . To-morrow, Monsieur Sucquier, we will talk at closer quarters."

And he went away, leaving the agent petrified with surprise, overjoyed, and saying to himself:

"That's how ownership changes the point of view!" A little further on, Silvère saw coming towards him Mme. Verlaque and her daughter, who, though he did not know it, had both been on the lookout for some time now for an opportunity to accost him. Mme. Verlaque always came easily through the most embarrassing difficulties; pointing to Ameline, she said to him in gracious, indifferent tones:

"Since he has given her to you, *cher monsieur*, take her and be happy."

"Many thanks, madame!" he replied; "but first I have

a little explanation to demand from her: allow me a moment's private conversation with your daughter."

And without waiting for her permission, he took Ameline by the hand and led her to the kiosk where some weeks before M. Sucquier had laid before this catechumen his edifying instructions. She trembled like a leaf; but by degrees grew reassured. He made her sit down opposite him, and looked fixedly at her. He discovered that the charm was not broken. No, the secret, irresistible charm was working still, and as of old, he thought of the little magic dog, whose bark had such sweet sounds that its music brought forgetfulness of all the ills of life.

"She does not come under the common law," he thought, "it would be absurd to judge her by the code of ordinary morality. She is so beautiful, everything ought to be forgiven her."

After a long silence:

"Ameline," he said to her, "I am ready to marry you, but I ought to tell you I shall not accept M. Trayaz's legacy: I have my reasons and will tell them to you later. Don't be under any mistake, I have nothing to offer you but the meagre salary of an assistant naturalist in the Museum de Paris. We shall have a hard time at first; we shall live on our love, our hopes and privations. What do you say?"

She did not believe him; she was persuaded he was making trial of her: if she had believed him, her reply would have been the same:

"You know," she said, "poverty has no terrors for me."

"That is right. But sometimes I have strange whims. One day I knelt at your feet, I would like to see you a moment at mine."

He had not to ask twice. Kneeling before him, she was like one of those sweet serious angels in sacred pictures, who make music round the child Jesus with viol and rebec. Her face wore an expression of virgin modesty and celestial goodness; he would have liked to enshroud her with clouds

of incense, to scatter before her branches of lilies and roses; he rejoiced that now she had lost her wings she could not take flight to Paradise, her home, which had lent her to earth. And yet he had brought her to his feet, and was looking scornfully at her who had been the delight of his heart, and who now was only a beautiful dream, an adorable chimera for him.

"My fair penitent, speak: I am listening. Have you not a confession to make to me? You say you have no fear of poverty; have you never wished to be rich? Has the devil never tempted you? During your stay here, has your heart always been faithful to me?"

Mme. Verlaque had foreseen this and had said to her: "If he question you, don't go and make foolish confessions; he knows nothing, and can know nothing; he is hard and proud, and will never pardon; if you confess, you are lost. Deny everything!" And she denied.

"Why do you suspect me of want of faith? Why do you do me this wrong?"

"Take care, a word may save or lose you. Let me implore you to be sincere, perfectly sincere: your future and mine depend on it . . . . Your great fault is, you are too easily led. Have you never had bad advice given you? Has it never been hinted to you that M. Trayaz was in love with you? Have you never made any advances to him? Have you never done or said anything that could make him believe you were ready to marry him?"

"Never," she said unhesitatingly, "never!"

He looked sadly at her.

"You are ready to swear it."

Then suddenly, putting his hand on her mouth:

"No, don't swear! for God's sake, don't swear! Ah, unhappy girl! The evening you came to that old man, who would not marry you, I was in ambush near the open window. Is it true that he told you the story of the man who sold his shadow? Is it false that he said to you, 'Mlle. Ameline Verlaque, you are very lovely, but you have no conscience?'"

She clung weeping to him: he disengaged himself, and pushed her away.

"Better die," he said, "than marry a wife I could neither respect nor believe, and who would oblige me one day to lose all self-respect, or kill her."

He looked so angry that she was frightened, and when she was frightened she closed her eyes. This time when she again found courage to open them, he was gone.

As he went by the house to get back to the main road, which leads to Lavandou, he noticed a young girl, rather thin, and with light brown hair, pale complexion, small delicate features, short, fine, rather humorous nose, bending down by a dog kennel, with a dish in her hand. It was Miss Sally Trayaz, who on her return from the cemetery had made up her mind to console an inconsolable dog. For three days Wasp had refused all food. Coaxing and caressing, sometimes threatening him with her switch, haranguing him in French and English, she had got him to eat at last.

"He has finished it all!" she cried out triumphantly to Silvère, showing him the empty dish. "But what patience I had to use!"

After that, she stood for some moments looking at him, her head erect, her face perfectly unmoved. It seemed to him that the eyes of this Franco-American girl were demanding La Figuière of him. He bowed respectfully and left her.

"She is insatiable," he thought; "like her father, she will die of indigestion."

He was walking up the big eucalyptus avenue, when he heard some one calling him. He turned round and caught sight of M. Noudet running after him.

"Where are you going?" said the notary. "I know there has been a room got ready for you here. Miss Sally Trayaz told me to excuse her to you for the liberty she has taken in coming to your house to stay without your leave; she declares it's the correct thing with cousins german. I was to tell you also she is very anxious to have a talk with you."

Silvère frowned: he had vowed to remain some hours at least without speaking to a woman.

"I am going to sleep at Lavandon," he replied, "and to-morrow I shall be at Collobrières, where I shall draw up a renunciation in good form. Since my cousin german wishes to talk with me, I shall have the honour of paying her my respects to-morrow morning. Tell her that henceforth she need have no scruples, that she is not in my house, but in her own."

And as the notary was beginning to protest:

"*Mon cher monsieur Noudet*, go and make enquiries, hunt up all the rumours that are current. They are only rumours, I grant you; but what difference does that make to me? I am not going to have it said that my submission to M. Trayaz has brought me one hundred and fifty thousand francs a year. Even, after his death my uncle is a great tempter, and always excelled in the art of making others unhappy. What would you have? I cannot alter myself, and I have always preferred misfortune to disgrace."

CHAPTER XXIV.

He kept his word: next morning he overcame his repugnance so far as to present himself at an early, even an unearthly hour, at La Figuière, in the hope that Miss Sally Trayaz would not yet be up, and that he would get off with leaving his card. He was in just the same gloomy mood as the day before, and felt an invincible antipathy for this unknown cousin german, who seemed to him much too eager to relieve him of his inheritance. Our hearts are like that; we do not want to take for ourselves, but we don't like those who do take.

He was out in his calculations: as if she had guessed his secret intention, Sal had been up very early, and at the moment of crossing one of the big, open spaces in the park, he saw her advancing up an avenue to meet him. She felt

that it is more comfortable to be in the open air, when one wishes to say certain things which should not be heard by the indiscreet. Not yet having been able to get mourning, she had chosen out of her frocks the one that was most sober in hue, and tied round her waist a black sash. Her rustic hat, which she had trimmed with black ribbons, was of a very peculiar shape: Silvère decided, rightly or wrongly, that she had the face and form of a little quakeress, but was certainly not the least little bit like an angel. She was accompanied by Wasp, whom she was keeping in order with her riding switch. "You see," she said, shaking hands with Silvère, "he is already rather fond of me."

"And very obedient to you," he replied.

"Ah, I am trying gentleness and kindness. Last night he slept on a rug near my bed . . . But, *mon cousin*, is it true . . . what M. Noudet told me yesterday evening . . ."

"He told you the bare, simple truth."

"Is it possible you are giving up your right to this beautiful house and estate and all its belongings? I am in love with La Figuière; it's the most delightful place I have ever seen. I love America, but I could easily reconcile myself to living here."

"That's a fancy you can soon gratify if you wish."

"Ah, yes; but I should not be happy in the most beautiful spot in the world if I had a conscience full of remorse, and I should have, if I thought I had taken from you everything you possess."

"Quakeresses have their hypocrisies," he thought. "Ameline is untruthful, she is not a hypocrite."

Sal had seated herself on a garden bench; he was standing before her, leaning on his stick.

"Wasp, do give over. I have told you before it's no use hunting for him, you won't find him. Get it into your head now that I am taking his place, and come and lie down at my feet . . . . Cousin," she continued, "you are quite decided not to marry Mlle. Verlaque? How beautiful she is! Might I ask you what it is you object to in her?"

"I object to her having no mind of her own, or if that

suits you better, of having always the mind of the last person who spoke to her, whoever that may be, and it sometimes happens that last person is a rogue."

"Oh! that is bad, very bad! It is better to have a bad character, than to have none at all. But often when we have been angry with people, we forgive them, and often too, when we have given up a thing, we want it back again. There is no hurry about this, take time to think it over."

"What should we gain, if I do?" he replied drily. "Never, believe me, never will I marry Mlle. Verlaque." And to himself he said: "Quakeresses like to make believe, and play a part, Ameline can't do it."

Sal had scolded Wasp for his restlessness, but she herself was very restless. She had risen, now bending double the whip in her hand, now tapping the bench with it. The open space they stood in was bordered by great eucalyptus trees, at the foot of which were intertwined climbing roses. She plucked a rose-bud; by turns she examined it with as much attention as a fakir in ecstasy could bestow on the contemplation of the end of his nose, and by turns rubbed it mechanically against her cheeks and lips. At last she made a plunge:

"Cousin, there is one way of setting it all right, I wish it may approve itself to you. You do not know me, but I know you. Last year, my father told me all about you, and in his letters since gave me the rest of your story. I reproached him with being too hard upon you, and threatened to defend you against him. I like you, you are someone; I like a man to be someone . . . . Yes, there is a way of arranging it all, of sparing you all regrets, and me all remorse . . . ."

She had spoken with head averted. Now she faced Silvère, stood straight before him, and with scarlet face looked him in the eyes:

"Cousin," she said, "will you marry me?"

He thought she was making fun of him, and replied:

"You would be very much surprised, *ma cousine*, if I were simple enough to take you at your word."

"You think I am joking?" she answered indignantly. "I tell you I am serious, very serious."

He did not know that it had long been her dream, as she had confessed to her father, to offer herself, if ever she became rich, to a young man who should be poor, but possessed of genius, and thus gain the right to look after him and provide him with all he might need. All the same, he had a kind of suspicion of these things as he looked into her little gray eyes, and saw reflected there strength of purpose, and a soul that was generous though it was proud.

"I should do well for myself!" he thought. "I should be her second Wasp, and according to my deserts she would give me the whip—or dainties. She is a chip of the old block, her father over again."

"You don't like my way out of it all?" she said, recoiling a step. "You could not endure me?"

"How could that be, *ma cousine?* You console unhappy dogs, and do not scorn a poor man . . . . I am deeply touched by your offer. But alas! I cannot accept it."

"Why not?"

"Would you marry a man whose eyes and heart carry the imprint of another woman?"

"I thought you cared no more for Mlle. Verlaque."

"My reason for not marrying her is that I care for her too much: I should be capable of allowing her anything, forgiving her anything."

"Yours is a truly singular case!" she said with a little irony and some resentment. "It is too deep for me: American girls are not taught how to solve such complicated problems."

"Then, too," he went on, "you do me the honour of saying I am someone. Should I be any one any longer if I were to marry Miss Sally Trayaz and her thirty millions?"

This reason seemed to her, if no better, still more comprehensible than the first.

"As you please; you don't like my plan: I have an-

other to propose to you. I will take La Figuière, and shall have the pleasure of living there; but I will pay you its rents, or if you wish, you could have the value of the property duly assessed, and I will pay you its price."

"That's impossible! I had only a conditional right to La Figuière, and I have forfeited it by refusing to fulfil the condition. What you propose would be a pure fraud on my part, and pure benevolence on yours. There are burdens I cannot bear."

This time she grew quite angry. She struck the ground with her foot:

"This is really too much. You refuse everything I propose. How can one possibly get on with you? You have a most detestable disposition, cousin . . . Forget Sal or remember her, I don't care which you do, you will never be anything to me."

She was going away; by persuasion, almost by force, he managed to bring her back, to induce her to take a seat again on the bench, and then sat down himself by her. He understood at last that this was a soul in which there was more generosity than pride. For a long time he talked to her almost tenderly, telling her what esteem and admiration she inspired in him.

"You shall be," he said, "my *Dame de Bon Secours*. If ever I am in distress, or even in difficulty, I will come to you: I vow that in such case I will accept your help or your gifts, without shame or blush, and will owe you great obligations without feeling their weight."

"You are growing kinder, and almost reasonable," she said, brightening. "That's the first nice thing you have said. But you will have to let me know how you are getting on. Will you write to me sometimes?"

"As often as you like."

"You see, Wasp, he is getting on, if we take great pains, we shall make something of him yet . . . . But, cousin, do accept some little thing from me to-day. I want you to, oh, I want you to so much. Do what I want this once. What will you ask of me?"

"Give me that poor flower you are crushing in your fingers."

"It will be faded this evening, ask me something much more valuable."

She begged so earnestly, he ended at last by saying: "At the other end of La Figuière, by the water's edge, in a pine wood, there is a little chalet built by an old painter and called the Antonine. You know it—you spent an hour there yesterday with our sweet relations, who did not give you a very warm welcome. I love the Antonine, give it to me, and if you want to crown your goodness, give me as well a cow and a boat."

"The Antonine is yours!" she cried radiantly. "I will get M. Noudet to make out a proper deed of transfer. Oh, what a good idea of yours! But now I come to think of it, having a cow means you will want a field; I will give you a field—a big one; you will allow me to enlarge your little property."

"A little, but not too much, please."

"And then I will refurnish the chalet, freshen it all up, and improve it . . . ."

"Not too much, *ma cousine*, not too much!"

"And you shall have two boats."

"No, that I can't allow. One will be quite enough."

"Oh, what a good idea of yours! Yes, I will enlarge the Antonine, and improve it according to my own ideas . . ."

"Not yours, *ma cousine*, mine, if you please . . . ."

"Leave me alone: if you are obstinate, I am still more so. I mean the chalet to be a little Paradise, where you will come and spend your holidays. How glad I am! We shall be neighbours, we will lunch and dine together, walk together, quarrel with each other and tell each other our minds, and you will teach me botany. We will be such good friends . . . . And then, my father told me you knew English: I write poems, I will read them to you, and if you don't understand them, I will explain."

And this last consideration delighting her more than all

the rest, she clapped her hands for pleasure; and so let fall the rosebud she had squeezed in her fingers and rubbed against her cheek; and Silvère picked it up.

A quarter of an hour later, he was on the way back to Collobrières. His mind was very full, and he had no thought of looking for plants. Sometimes he was thinking of a pair of grey eyes, whose owner had reconciled him with the human race, and telling himself a woman's friendship can bring much happiness into a life. Sometimes his thoughts were of the Antonine: it was his; however Sal might arrange it, it would be a domain just big enough for him, a delicious nest for a little bird, that meant to grow great one day. Suddenly a face he could not forget put to flight in a moment every other idea; he could see nothing but Ameline Verlaque, that most perverse of all innocent girls; he thought of her smiles, her untruths, all she had said, the great tears that had rolled down her face, and his heart contracted.

Divided between plans for a radiant future, and memories of the bitter past, he went his way with high head, leaving firm foot-prints in the white dust of the highway, cheered by a rose-bud he held in the corner of his mouth; as he was walking with his back to the sun, he could make sure too, that he had not sold his shadow, which stretched out before him as he went along.

THE END.

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